

**PUBLIC SERVICE INTEGRATION IN KAZAKHSTAN:
THE CASE OF ONE STOP SHOP**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is of my own composition, based on my own work, with acknowledgement of other sources, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the public service integration, a New Public Management initiative, in a transitional context such as Kazakhstan. This thesis focuses on three main perspectives – the impact of the service integration policy on those who was involved in the implementation process; the problematic aspects of service integration in a transitional context; and the use of “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” in analysing service integration. By combining New Public Management theory (in particular, the ideas on decentralising management and customer-orientation), service integration theory and organisational learning theories, and rich empirical data, this thesis found that public service integration was implemented in the Kazakhstani context to a limited extent. Through the use of triangulation of methods which incorporated case study, interviews, participant observation, virtual ethnography and documentary analysis, this thesis captured complex, non-linear and diverse power dimensions and relationships between the new single-window centres, traditional service providers and customers. The development of the “communities of practice” among the front-line personnel was analysed within service integration policy context.

Promoting service integration is seen as beneficial for both service providers and customers in Kazakhstan, but there are both conceptual and practical challenges. Although significant progress in public service improvement was achieved and noted in the research, this thesis found that the One Stop Shops inherited relations-based, patronage system and corruption from the traditional bureaucracy. It found that the new technologies, while improving access to the public services, were used to extend centralised control across the regions. This thesis also found that organisational learning did take place, however, in the underdeveloped form of adaptive learning, with the lack of critical reflection on the existing ways of working. This thesis concluded that the institutional framework and culture prevailing in the Kazakhstani traditional bureaucracy constrained implementation of the service integration policy to a full extent.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	Agency for Informatisation and Communication
ALRM	Agency for Land Resource Management
CoP	Communities of Practice
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MEBP	Ministry of Economy and Budget Planning
MD	Ministry of Defense
MH	Ministry of Healthcare
MJ	Ministry of Justice
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
NPM	New Public Management
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSS	One Stop Shops
RK	Republic of Kazakhstan
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TAP	Traffic and Administrative Police
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, academics, political scientists and international organisations have focused their attention on managerial reforms in post-communist countries. Within the region of Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), New Public Management (NPM) reforms became one of the priorities because these reforms were expected to improve the quality of governance, and that, in turn, should have led to the entrenchment of new democratic political systems and market economies. In promoting NPM ideas, many international organisations encouraged recipient countries to reform their public administration systems. Regardless of the claims made by the advocates or opponents of the managerial reforms, the NPM concept still remains a top priority on the agenda of many governments in the post-communist region.

This thesis contributes to the debate on the applicability and appropriateness of managerial reforms in transitional countries by examining implementation of the ‘One Stop Shop’ policy (OSS) in the post-Soviet Central Asian state of Kazakhstan.¹ The public administration reform in Kazakhstan has introduced a new public sector organization – OSS – as an innovative approach to citizen-centred service delivery. The term “OSS” is defined as the provision of services and information of different government bodies through one location (Hagen and Kubicek, 2000). The OSS policy is aiming to bring together a wide range of public services from across central government departments and local municipalities (*akimats*) to provide citizens with high quality, integrated and easy-to-access service.² Kazakhstan is considered to be a front-runner in the NPM reforms compared to other Central Asian states. By comparison, the neighbouring countries either have not been able to reform their respective civil services consistently, due to political instability (for example, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan), or the reform measures they have enacted have been largely conservative in nature (for example, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; Duvanova, 2008; Knox, 2008; Perlman and Gleason, 2007). The case of Kazakhstan is peculiar.

¹ “One Stop Shops” are referred to in the legislation as “Public Service Centres”. In this thesis the term “One Stop Shop” is used along with the term “single-window”.

² The Kazakh term “akimat” is used to define a “local municipality”.

During the early years of independence, under the influence of various Western institutions, it has been enthusiastically introducing modern aspects of public administration within the context of rapid economic liberalisation. Kazakhstan is regarded as a new model for the developing world (Perlman and Gleason, 2007), moving “forward in its evolution toward a democratic country” (Knox, 2008: 486), as evidenced since 2010 by the country’s confirmation to the rotating chair of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Although this thesis is mainly drawn from the experience of Kazakhstan and focuses on post-communist bureaucratic challenges, it has potentially far-reaching implications, because it draws attention to the impact of political regimes on state capacity and the culture of traditional bureaucracy. These issues are relevant in a variety of regional and political settings. Through the analysis of consecutive stages of the OSS policy development (marked by the adoption of important documents in 2005, 2007, and 2009), this research evaluates the extent to which Kazakhstan’s legislative changes promoted “better quality for less costs”, customer-orientation, transparency and accountability in the public service provision. The photo below (Figure 1) illustrates the customer service environment and design of the single-window centre, which helps a reader to visualize a typical Kazakhstani OSS as we enter into the discussion on the OSS policy implementation.

Figure 1: One Stop Shop in Kazakhstan



The single-window centre represents a counter service in a modern and well-designed space, which is available for citizens, and tries, in a more business-like atmosphere, to process customers' requests for official documents, the payment of registration fees and similar services. During the period of data collection for this research project, from December 2006 to December 2008, the OSS provided access to 25 services of three key stakeholders: the Ministry of Justice (MJ) of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK), a coordinator of reform (legal services, for example, issuing a passport, business registration, property registration); Agency for Land Resource Management (ALRM) (land services), and Ministry of Defence (MD) (registration of military servants in reserve).³ The full list of services delivered through the single-window arrangements is provided in Chapter 5. This research does not cover the 32 new services, which have been added to the scope of the OSS services since January 2009 after this fieldwork was finished, however, Chapter 9 provides a brief discussion of the selected new services based on the secondary data.

This thesis analyses OSS policy implementation with a particular focus on service integration processes drawing on the experiences of the OSS managers, front-office employees and service users.⁴ It uses a qualitative approach to understanding and examining the transformation of public service delivery processes as it is contextually driven and requires a high degree of interpretative work. This introduction sets out the research questions of the thesis; provides the background for service integration policy in Kazakhstan in order to contextualise the research; indicates the key research problems and the findings in relation to these, and outlines the structure of the thesis by providing a brief summary of each chapter.

³ "Stakeholders" are used to define government bodies which work in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice to deliver joined-up services through OSS.

⁴ The terms "front-office" or "front-line" are used to define staff at the front line of customer service. The term "back-office" is used to define government officials from stakeholder departments who review applications and make decisions "at the back stage" of service delivery process. The terms "service user", "customer" and "client" are used interchangeably in this thesis to define users of the public services.

1.1 THE AIMS OF THE THESIS

The aim of the research was to examine the processes of public service integration in Kazakhstan, using the different experiences of those involved in policy implementation: the managers of the single-window centres and coordinating authority, front-line employees and customers. Further to this the research aimed to analyse the conceptual and practical difficulties associated with the transfer of the managerial idea of service integration to the post-communist context such as Kazakhstan. Bardach (1998) and Bloom et al. (2008) highlight that service integration is a learning process. “Organisational learning” entails individuals questioning and challenging the organisation, leading to a deeper level of understanding and reassessment of values and assumptions (Argyris and Schon, 1978a). Public service integration has challenged the traditional bureaucracy by stimulating knowledge exchange across professional and organisational boundaries. Learning based on everyday practice in the workplace and other social settings takes place within “communities of practice”, which are single, localised, and relatively small communities (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Thus, this research aimed to test the appropriateness of the use of the concepts “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” in analysing service integration processes. These aims were operationalised through three research questions the development of which is discussed further in Chapters 2-4. The following research questions give structure to this thesis and significance to its findings (see Table 1).

Table 1: Research Questions

Research Questions	
1.	<i>What are the experiences of those involved in the implementation of public service integration through single-window arrangements in Kazakhstan?</i>
2.	<i>In what ways is service integration a problematic concept in a transitional context such as Kazakhstan?</i>
3.	<i>Are concepts such as “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” useful tools in analysing public service integration?</i>

These research questions are significant given the importance of effective and cost-efficient public services to Kazakhstan's ability to modernise its society and economy. These questions recognise that service, quality and learning are contextual; for this reason I explored these concepts in particular contexts of the case study organisations. Questions 1-2 helped to prepare a basis for answering research question 3. Each of these research questions requires a multi-layered answer. These answers involve reviewing appropriate literature, referencing empirical data, and the construction of conceptual instruments to enable a full analysis. In each case, the answers cross-reference, each contributing towards a holistic vision of public service integration in Kazakhstan.

A number of influences shaped my interest in this research and the methodological approach undertaken. As set out in Section 1.2 below, public service integration through a single-window arrangement is a highly topical and politically sensitive area. Public service integration policy was launched quite recently in Kazakhstan, in February 2005, by the Presidential initiative to improve the quality of public services and orientate the government towards customer needs (Nazarbayev, 2005a). Given the high disparity of the population over a large territory of the country, with nearly half of the citizens living in rural areas, low level of computer literacy and limited Internet access, face-to-face interaction between the government and clients through the single-window centres still remains the most significant access point to public services. Within five years of policy implementation the spectrum of OSS services has been increased from 25 to 57 services, and the number of the single-window centres has expanded from four pilots to over 300 physical offices across the country. Therefore, understanding the operation and impact of the system is of great importance. The responses to service quality improvement by using the single-window arrangement are indicative of the broader trends of how the Kazakhstani government responds to the needs of its citizens' and pressure from the international community, which it is very keen to become part of.

I am interested in public service integration area because I worked in the Civil Service Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Agency) for six years prior to my doctoral study and witnessed radical changes in the Kazakhstani public sector. In addition, my personal interest in this research was shaped by studying NPM literature and discussions with practitioners who participated in my training sessions at the Eurasian Civil Service Training Centre and shared their concerns on the implementation of Western ideas in the post-communist context. My knowledge of the local political system characterised by hierarchical, “monolithic” and corrupt bureaucracy also contributed to my desire to understand how a new managerial policy such as service integration would be implemented in Kazakhstan, how the policy would affect those who would be implementing it, how the policy would challenge the existing structure and culture, and finally to be able to carry out research that will contribute to the policy development. Therefore, in other words, this research combines my professional interests, knowledge of the local context and academic interests.

Whilst the overall outcomes of the public service integration policy, such as quality improvement, cost-effectiveness and fighting corruption, are clearly articulated in the official documents, the links between them and the guidelines for implementation are vague, implicit and in some cases contradictory. The development of the legislation is summarised below and discussed further in Chapter 5. In order to analyse factors affecting patterns of public service integration in Kazakhstan, my interest was to explore different areas (political, cultural, organisational and technological), in which strategic decisions on policy design, selection of the specific types of technologies and services were influenced by the international trends in managerial reforms and a dynamic interplay of internal and external factors. This thesis may not reflect the full complexity of the relationships between key variables, which require re-contextualisation and significant learning on a variety of local circumstances. However, this research project aims to provide a useful basis for understanding and explaining the impact of the political regime on state capacity, the culture of traditional bureaucracy and the implementation of public service integration in a transitional context.

Further to this, these interests affect who my intended audiences are. Aside from my supervisors and examiners, I am interested in addressing an audience of academics. This work aims to make a valuable contribution to the theoretical interpretation of service integration in the context of managerial reforms in transitional countries, which in the academic discourse still remains unexplored. I also address Kazakhstani policymakers who may find the results and conclusions of this research project useful for the improvement of policy implementation. While the situation in the Kazakhstani public sector in many respects is similar to the situation in other post-communist states, academics and governments from the neighbouring countries may find the results and conclusions of this research project applicable to their countries as well. Thus, this research combines an interest arising from my experience in the civil service with academic interests developed during teaching practice, and practical strategic decisions.

Based on the research questions above, a number of choices were made regarding appropriate research strategies. The importance of context in understanding and analysing the service integration process was clear both from the literature and the policy itself: “implementation is not just about choosing and implementing a programme of change that reflects ‘best practice’ but understanding political contingencies that may affect the successful implementation of a change programme” (Osborne and Brown, 2005: 67).

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, this research uses a qualitative rather than quantitative approach, as the service integration process is contextually driven and requires a high degree of interpretative work. Combining participant observation, interviews, policy documents, case studies and virtual ethnography provided data from different angles on the implementation process, and on the different responses that have emerged. Two case studies of the OSS were examined in Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan, which provided rich empirical data for analysis and formed an important context for gaining a detailed, in-depth understanding of the service integration process. The case organisations were launched as pilot projects in November 2005. By the start of data collection which took place from December

2006 to December 2008, the case organisations have accumulated the most experience in design and delivery of joined-up services compared to other single-window centres which were established one-two years later. New service procedures, technologies and innovations were piloted first at the case organisations, which transferred their experiences to the regions at a later stage. Hence, selected cases were able to provide rich empirical data on the issues of learning new work practices and service arrangements.

Participant observation of the daily work practices within the case organisations provided first-hand insight into the challenges, tensions and contradictions of the front-line customer service. It is important to emphasise that the research was not limited to the selected sites in Astana. In addition to the examination of the work practices in the case organisations, interviews with 11 managers of the single-window centres from different regions, 5 senior managers from the coordinating authority, and 25 front-line employees were conducted and analysed. The rich empirical data combined with the analysis of web-discussions among service users and extensive secondary data in the form of policy documents, survey reports and mass media publications, provided an opportunity to grasp a broad overview of the policy implementation from the views of those who have introduced legislative changes, those who implemented policies in practice and those who have experienced customer service at the new public organisations.

The thesis structure is outlined below, indicating the ways in which these themes are addressed throughout it. The study begins by developing a framework for the analysis (Chapters 2-3). This combines a review of NPM, service integration, concepts of “organisational learning” and “communities of practice”, each of which are contested domains. The ways in which this research project is put into practice and the challenges it poses are outlined in the discussion of the research design and practice (Chapter 4). The study then moves on to analyse different dimensions of public service integration within the single-window centres across regions adopting a macro-perspective (Chapters 5-6). Chapter 5 reviews the key stages of policy implementation and analyses the underlying reasons for shifting from the original

“single-access model” towards a country-specific “alternative-access model”. Chapter 6 analyses power dimensions and the development of relationships between the key stakeholders, as well as examining the use of control mechanisms over the performance of the OSS managers and front-line staff. Against this background and by way of illustration, the research then turns to a micro level case study of the personnel policies within the single-window centres by examining selection, recruitment and training policies as well as gendered divisions (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 explores experiences and perceptions of the front-line employees from the case organisations in the process of learning and adopting new working practices and service arrangements. Chapter 9 provides a discussion of the corrupt culture of the public service in Kazakhstan in relation to the single-window centres, and explores customers’ perceptions of the new service organisations compared to the traditional government bodies. In the final chapter the answers to the research questions, the implications of the study for the analysis of managerial reforms in the transitional context, the appropriateness of the concepts such as “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” in the context of Kazakhstan are discussed (Chapter 10).

Overall, this thesis presents a qualitative case study of the service integration processes in the public sector of Kazakhstan. It draws on research with the service providers (OSS managers and front-line employees) to analyse the impact of the political system on the extent and progress of policy implementation. It also takes into account the voices of the services users who experienced customer service through single-window arrangements. The findings are focused around the key analytic themes relating to the impact of the political system on the policy implementation, defining and promoting service integration, and challenges constraining policy implementation. It is argued that, within a difficult policy context of this transitional country, many positive achievements as well as strategic failures have been made in Kazakhstan in relation to the improvement in quality of public services, and fighting corruption. The background for public service integration and the context for this research are discussed in the following section. Whilst the focus of this research is on the service integration policy, with case studies located in Astana, this has to be understood within the broader context of the managerial

reforms in Kazakhstan. Key trends are summarised in this section, prior to an in-depth critical analysis of the literature in Chapters 2-3 and the policy analysis in Chapters 5-10.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

It is largely accepted as a fact that national cultures affect the structures and performance of public administration. As Lachman, Nedd and Hinings (1994: 52) state, “Imported practices may fail, or be ineffectively implemented, if they are inconsistent with the core values of local settings”. Explanation of the relations between contextual factors and a new policy will help me to lead a discussion on why service integration policy has taken a country-specific form in Kazakhstan, what impact the political system has had on the culture of the customer-oriented bureaucracy, the nature of service integration processes, and what challenges have constrained policy implementation.

There are a number of features about Kazakhstan that make it both an interesting and important location for the research. Kazakhstan is emerging as the most dynamic economic and political actor in Central Asia (Dave, 2007). It is the second largest country of the former Soviet Union, after the Russian Federation, and has rich natural resources, particularly oil and gas reserves, which are being exploited through massive foreign investment. Despite remarkable economic transformation under the leadership of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, in 2008 the overall poverty rate was estimated to be 15 percent of the population, exceeding 60 percent in some oil-rich rural regions (World Bank, 2008). Kazakhstan has the lowest social indicators in the regions of Europe and Central Asia (for example, in terms of access to safe drinking water, incidence of tuberculosis and AIDS), which illustrate the poor quality of socially significant public services, such as health and social care. One of the significant challenges for Kazakhstan in improving public service quality at lower cost is its small population size (15.4 million people) spread over a vast territory which is equal in size to the Western Europe (1 million square miles), with nearly half of the citizens, 43 percent, living in the rural areas.

The political system of the country raises serious concerns among the academic community and is criticized for monopolizing political power, clanism and nepotism (Cummings, 2005; Duvanova, 2008; Emrich-Bakenova, 2009; Perlman and Gleason, 2007; Schatz, 2004). General public dissatisfaction with the poor quality of public services delivered by the government bodies and public sector organisations (hospitals, schools, traffic police, tax bodies etc.) has resulted in the formulation of a negative image of the government (Jandosova, 2003; Jandosova, 2007).

The political leadership of Kazakhstan wants the country to become one of the world's top oil producers and to enter the top 50 competitive economies. Kazakhstan is under growing pressure by the international community to engage in political reforms which include a modernisation agenda to improve quality of public services (Knox, 2008). Since January 2010 this is particularly significant in light of the present chairmanship of Kazakhstan in the OSCE, although serious concerns were raised that Kazakhstan could undermine integrity of the OSCE's human-rights principles (Kucera, 2009; Lillis, 2009). Many regional experts continue to assert that Kazakhstan does not adequately represent the OSCE's democratic values, and, therefore, does not deserve to chair the organisation. In response to the critique of the international community President Nazarbayev said that Western-style democracy cannot be quickly implemented in Kazakhstan. Although Kazakhstan has achieved certain results in developing democratic legislation, the Kazakhstani government endorsed a number of non-democratic legislative acts. These include the adoption of the law that restricts freedom of expression via the Internet, and passing a draft law that restricts disclosure of information about the personal lives of the public figures and allows for the criminal prosecution of journalists (Marat, 2009). These examples present a snapshot of the authoritarian political system in Kazakhstan which is important to understand in order to allow for follow analysis of the managerial reform in the transitional context.

An overview of the findings of the international survey report is presented below to contextualise the political, socio-economic and technological environment of the country, and to examine Kazakhstan from a comparative perspective with other post-communist countries. Discussion of the country's background enables a reader to understand the interplay of complex internal and external factors that have shaped the service integration policy in a country-specific form in the process of transferring the managerial ideas from developed democracies to the transitional context.

According to the survey on *Worldwide Governance Indicators* which captures six key dimensions of governance in 212 countries over more than a decade 1996-2008, Kazakhstan is pictured in an unfavourable position compared to some post-communist states, such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (see Table 2) (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2009). *Voice and Accountability* measures the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, freedom of expression and a free media. *Political Stability* measures the perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including domestic violence and terrorism. *Regulatory Quality* measures the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development. *Rule of Law* measures the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, in particular the quality of contract enforcement, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence.

Table 2: Kazakhstan in Worldwide Governance Indicators, 1996-2008

	Voice and Accountability	Political Stability	Government Effectiveness	Regulatory Quality	Rule of Law	Control of Corruption
Singapore	35	96	100	99.5	94	99.5
Estonia	83	67	84	92	85	79
Latvia	73	59	70	83	71	65
Lithuania	72	72	72	85	68	63
Russia	22	24	45	31	20	16
Kazakhstan	19	64	39	40	24	16
Kyrgyzstan	26	22	26	42	8	13
Uzbekistan	2	18	27	6	10	11
Tajikistan	10	21	17	16	12	15
Turkmenistan	1	53	11	2	7	5

Adopted from Kaufmann, D., Kraay A. and Mastruzzi, M. (2009) *Governance Matters VIII: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators for 1996 - 2008*, Washington: World Bank, <http://www.govindicators.org>

Table 2 shows the survey results of 10 countries in terms of aggregate and individual governance indicators from 1996-2008 in order to compare Kazakhstan with other post-communist states. The *aggregate indicators* combine the views of a large number of enterprise, citizen and expert survey respondents in industrial and developing countries. The *individual data* underlying the aggregate indicators are drawn from a diverse variety of survey institutes, think tanks, non-government organisations, and international organisations. Singapore was included in this table as an exemplary model for Kazakhstan chosen by the political leadership: a country with “eastern mentality” which successfully eliminated corruption.

The indicators “government effectiveness” and “control of corruption” are also considered here: Government effectiveness measures the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies. In terms of government effectiveness Kazakhstan (score of 39) is behind Russia (45), but remains the highest

in the Central Asia region (Uzbekistan – 27; Kyrgyzstan – 26; Tajikistan – 17; and Turkmenistan – 11), which testifies to the ongoing progress of the public sector modernisation agenda. However, Kazakhstan is lagging far behind other post-communist countries, such as Estonia (84), Lithuania (72), and Latvia (70).

The next indicator - “control of corruption” - measures the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including petty and high forms of corruption, as well as “capture” of the state by elites and private interests. The control of corruption in Kazakhstan (16) is much lower than in Baltic states (Estonia – 79, Latvia – 65, Lithuania – 63). The situation with the control of corruption in Kazakhstan is similar to the situation in Russia (16) and other Central Asian states (Tajikistan – 15, Kyrgyzstan – 13, and Uzbekistan – 11). While Kazakhstan is leading in Central Asia region in terms of “government effectiveness”, the “control of corruption” in the country is still very weak and similar to the situation in Russia and neighbouring Central Asian states. Kazakhstan is lagging far behind Baltic countries, which illustrate bright examples of successful transformation from Soviet centralized bureaucratic systems to democratic market economies, thus justifying that good governance is not the sole preserve of rich, industrialised countries, but can be found around the world. It is worth highlighting at this stage that the political management of Kazakhstan tends to avoid comparisons with the Baltic states. By contrast, it actively uses effect of positive, stable economic and political situation in Kazakhstan compared to the “colour revolutions” in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Georgia.

Singapore, a model for Kazakhstan in driving public management reform, has one of the best world rankings in terms of government effectiveness (100) and control of corruption (99.5). However, Singapore ranks in the middle on voice and accountability (35), far below poorer post-communist states (for example, Baltic countries). The Singapore public service is regarded as almost entirely free from corruption, a fact that in a large part reflects the strong emphasis the national leadership placed on probity and dedication to national values with the lack of democratic mechanisms.

The high level of corruption in Kazakhstan is also confirmed by the *Corruption Perception Index* (CPI) report published by Transparency International. The CPI survey report by Transparency International relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by the business people and country analysts among 180 countries, and ranges from 10, as highly clean, and 0, as highly corrupt. According to the CPI survey report Kazakhstan is ranked 120th among the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International, 2009).

Table 3: Kazakhstan in “Corruption Perception Index 2009”

Country rank	Country	2009 CPI score
3	Singapore	9.2
27	Estonia	6.6
52	Lithuania	4.9
56	Latvia	4.5
120	Kazakhstan	2.7
146	Russia	2.2
158	Tajikistan	2.0
162	Kyrgyzstan	1.9
168	Turkmenistan	1.8
174	Uzbekistan	1.7

Adopted from Transparency International report “Corruption Perception Index 2009”, http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009

The CPI focuses on corruption in the public sector and defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain. The surveys used in compiling the CPI ask questions relating to the misuse of public power for private benefit. These include, for example: bribery of public officials, misuse of public funds and questions that probe the strength and effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts, thereby encompassing both the administrative and political aspects of corruption. Table 3 shows that the CPI score of Kazakhstan in 2009 is 2.7, which is far below Estonia (6.6), Lithuania (4.9), and Latvia (4.5). In terms of the CPI score, Kazakhstan is better when compared to Russia (2.2) and other Central Asia states: Tajikistan (2.0), Kyrgyzstan (1.9), Turkmenistan (1.8) and Uzbekistan (1.7). Singapore has one of the highest CPI

scores (9.2) reflecting political stability, long-established conflict of interest regulations, and solid, functioning public institutions. Realising that corruption presents fundamental challenges to build-up a transparent and democratic government, the political leadership has placed high expectations on the public service integration policy as a panacea from corruption and public service failures. The corrupt culture of the public sector in Kazakhstan is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, which examines the impact of the traditional bureaucracy on the new public service organisations by illustrating examples of the illegal practices within single-window centres.

It is important to examine the technological infrastructure of the country given the significant role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in improving the activities of public sector organisations and their agents (Heeks, 2003). The expected outcome of service integration is building joined-up government, which enables information to be gathered and shared across departments, and public services to be re-organised and joined together in an integrative manner. Thus, the technological infrastructure in the country can enable or constrain service integration as a means to overcome distance and assist vulnerable groups in remote locations to get access to the public services.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) publishes e-readiness rankings through a weighted index comprising of about 100 quantitative and qualitative criteria. According to the EIU rating Kazakhstan is positioned in 66th place among 70 countries with a score of 3.89 out of maximum 10, which is far below Estonia (7.10), Latvia and Lithuania (6.03), and Russia (4.42). Kazakhstan is the only country in the Central Asia region covered by the EIU, and the report lacks any explanation of the reasons for the missing data on the other Central Asian countries. Table 4 shows the overall benchmarking of Kazakhstan's e-readiness as well as its ranking in specific categories such as the connectivity and technological infrastructure; the business environment; the social and cultural environment; the legal environment; government policy and vision, and finally consumer and business adoption. *Connectivity and technological infrastructure* measures the extent to which individuals and businesses

can access mobile networks and the Internet, and their ability to access digital services through means such as digital identity cards. The *business environment* covers such factors as the strength of the economy, political stability, taxation, competition policy, the labour market, and openness to trade and investment. The *social and cultural environment* measures the population's literacy and basic education as well as "e-literacy", i.e. experience using the Internet and its receptivity to it. The *legal environment* reflects those legal frameworks that have a direct impact on the use of digital technology to inform, communicate and transact business. *Government policy and vision* assesses the activities of governments in leading citizens to a future government, which is digital and has a clear roadmap for the adoption of technology. Finally, *consumer and business adoption* looks at the amount that businesses and consumers spend on accessing ICT services and their adoption levels of e-commerce, as well as availability of digital channels for accessing government services.

Table 4: Kazakhstan in "E-readiness Rankings 2008"

Categories	Weight (%)	KAZ	Highest Score/Country	Lowest Score/Country
Overall score		3.89	8.95 (USA)	3.30 (Iran)
Connectivity and technological infrastructure	20%	3.30	9.60 (Switzerland)	2.25 (Vietnam)
Business environment	15%	5.66	8.65 (Denmark)	4.40 (Iran)
Social and cultural environment	15%	3.80	9.13 (Australia)	3.20 (Azerbaijan)
Legal environment	10%	3.70	9.80 (Hong Kong)	2.20 (Iran)
Government policy and vision	15%	2.85	9.85 (Denmark)	2.50 (Iran)
Consumer and business adoption	25%	4.05	9.70 (Singapore)	2.25 (Iran)

Adopted from "The 2008 E-readiness Rankings – a White Paper from the Economist Intelligence Unit", <http://www.eiu.com>

As is apparent from Table 4, the present state of e-readiness in Kazakhstan is considered to be very close to the lowest score in most of the categories. Only five countries, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Indonesia, Iran and Vietnam were ranked below Kazakhstan. The combination of factors such as lack of clarity in government policy and vision, an inadequate legal environment, low connectivity and technological infrastructure, as well as the social and cultural environment, have posed significant constraints to successful public service integration in the country.

Some international reports are more positive in their evaluation of Kazakhstan's progress in developing a technological infrastructure. According to the United Nations "*E-Government Survey 2008: from E-Government to Connected Governance 2008*", Kazakhstan is continuously showing strong progress in improving the overall e-environment. The report ranks 192 countries on their readiness for e-government services based on the composite of Web Measure, Telecom Infrastructure and Human Capital indices. The *Web Measure* index is primarily the measure of the presence/absence of specific electronic facilities/services available on the official website and/or some sectoral sites, e.g. health, education, social welfare.

The ranking for Kazakhstan in 2008 was 16 ranks higher than that achieved in 2005 which itself was 18 ranks higher than that achieved in 2003. This report particularly emphasises the improvements made in the government site (<http://www.government.kz>) and the president's site (<http://www.akorda.kz>). Despite this rapid improvement in rankings and the fact that Kazakhstan received very high scores on the Human Capital Index, the level exceeding Singapore and other developed countries, Kazakhstan is ranked 81st out of 192 countries in terms of overall e-government readiness, lagging behind Estonia (13), Lithuania (28), Latvia (36), and Russia (60). In the Central Asia region Kazakhstan is followed by Kyrgyzstan (102), Uzbekistan (109), Turkmenistan (128), and Tajikistan (132).

The overall conclusion of the international survey reports by the EIU and United Nations is that despite positive signs of ICT infrastructure development, e-government readiness of the country remains very low. The significant challenge for Kazakhstan is the continuing and widening digital divide defined by Fink and Kenny (2003: 2) as a gap in access to ICT, the ability to use ICT, actual use and the impact of use. According to the National Programme of Building-Up E-government in Kazakhstan in 2005-2007, the percentage of the population who were computer literate was 4.5%, which included 2.3 percent of Internet users. However, the ICT infrastructure and use of Internet has developed dynamically in Kazakhstan. The number of households with access to computers has tripled within the last five years up to 15 percent including 5 percent of active Internet users. While only 22 percent of citizens have access to land-line telephone communication, 100 percent of the population is covered by mobile phone technologies.

Kazakhstan, being a large geographical country, is facing much more diverse socio-economic and technological conditions than many successful e-government countries with relatively small territorial entities (for example, the Baltic states and Singapore). There are significant variations in Internet availability, usage, affordability and reliability between large cities and rural areas. Given the disparity of the population across the country, low level of computer literacy and limited Internet access, customer service through *face-to-face* rather than *virtual* communication still remains a vitally important access point to the public services for Kazakhstanians, particularly in the case of vulnerable groups and rural inhabitants.

Thus, the managerial idea of public service integration has been introduced into the transitional context of a post-communist Central Asian country which is characterised by the authoritarian political regime, high level of corruption, lack of public accountability and low level of e-government readiness. At the same time Kazakhstan has high human capital illustrated by the dynamic growth of the computer literacy and spread of Internet usage, which is promising with regards to the technological side of the policy implementation. One of the main targets of the Kazakhstani administrative reform during the last 10 years has been to improve the

quality of public services and reduce the level of corruption (Janenova, 2008a; Kaparov, 2006; Knox, 2008). Kazakhstani public administration has not been immune to the international trend of NPM, which presents a fundamental challenge to the traditional inertial bureaucracy. The main priorities for the current administrative reforms were defined as follows:

- to improve the quality of public administration processes, procedures and public service provision;
- to improve professional skills, efficiency and co-ordination of the state apparatus; and
- to reduce risks of corruption (Presidential Decree No. 274, 13 January 2007).

The single-window centres as innovative, customer-oriented organisations, have proved to be highly popular with citizens more used to being shunted from one public body to another by poorly motivated civil servants lacking in customer orientation (Knox, 2008: 489). Table 5 indicates the development of public service integration policy by setting out key points from the Kazakhstani legislation.

Table 5: OSS Policy Legislation – Key Points

	Legislation	Key points
November 2005	Government Resolution on the “Establishment of Public Service Centres on a pilot basis by the Ministry of Justice, Tax Committee and Agency for Land Resource Management”	4 pilot OSS were launched: two in Astana and two in Almaty. Civil servants from stakeholder departments train new front-line staff.
December 2005	Presidential Decree entitled “State Ant-Corruption Programme for 2006-2010”	OSS were defined as one of the key tools in combating corruption.
November 2007	Government Resolution “Development of E-government in Kazakhstan during 2008-2010”	E-services were piloted in the OSS. Target was set that by 2010 most public services would be provided through OSS and e-government portal.
From January 2007	Government Resolution on “Establishment of State Entities “Public Service Centres of the Ministry of Justice of RK”	30 OSS were established. Main function of OSS “to accept application and return processed documents” was stipulated. Tax Committee withdrew the project. New partner, the Ministry of Defence, joined. List of 25 services was adopted.
2007-2008	Orders of the Minister of Justice on “Establishment of Public Service Centres at the regional and village level”	Over 200 OSS were created.
October 2008	Order of the Minister of Justice on “Introducing call-centres in the OSS in Astana on a pilot basis”	Call-centre and mobile technology were piloted in the OSS in Astana.
January 2009	Government Resolution on “Public Services Delivery through Public Service Centres of the Ministry of Justice of RK”	New stakeholders (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Transport and Communication, Ministry of Environment Management, local municipalities, etc.) joined OSS with 32 new services. The number of OSS was expanded up to 300 offices.
January 2010	Amendment to the Law on Local Government and Self-Government in the Republic of Kazakhstan	The local municipalities were delegated coordination authorities over OSS from the Ministry of Justice.

As apparent from Table 5, the public service integration policy is characterised by complex continuous negotiations between the traditional government bodies and the coordinating authority of the OSS policy over the re-distribution of functions, staff, financial resources, design and delivery of joined-up services. All of these issues are analysed throughout the thesis. In particular, Chapter 5 contains a detailed discussion on the progress of the development of the legal framework for the OSS policy and the shaping of a country-specific model of service delivery through single-window arrangements.

A hierarchical political system characterised by the patronage and clientele system prevailing in the Kazakhstani public sector (Cummings, 2005; Duvanova, 2008; Janenova, 2009b; Schatz, 2004), and “eastern” cultural values (Perlman and Gleason, 2007) raise serious concerns over the successful implementation of the Western managerial policy in the transitional context. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of the political system on the experiences of those who were involved in service integration process by learning and adopting new working practices, re-negotiating professional identities and facing contradictory quantitative and qualitative dimensions of public service quality. The key factor in the increasing significance of the OSS policy is the rising number of public services delivered through single-window approach, and the government’s intention to delegate provision of most public services to the OSS with the expectation that “reducing personal points of contact lessens opportunities for corrupt practices” (Knox, 2008: 489).

This brief summary of the country and policy background has indicated the key problems reflected in the research questions posed in this thesis relating to the potential impact of the political system on the policy implementation and the complexity of the service integration process in the transitional context. What follows now is an outline of the significance of this research for social policy and public management studies, the empirical data generated and its contribution to existing knowledge.

1.3 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The theoretical significance of this research

This research contributes to the debate on the applicability and appropriateness of managerial reforms in transitional countries by examining the implementation of the single-window policy in the post-communist Central Asian state of Kazakhstan. The thesis maps the public service integration process in Kazakhstan, identifying the main challenges and constraints upon policy implementation, which are typical for many transitional countries. In particular the research analyses how the NPM idea of customer-orientation has been transferred and re-contextualised in the transitional context, using the case of the single-window centres. In contributing to the debate about forces shaping public services and particular characteristic features of public services, I have attempted to bring together a range of academic insights and theoretical perspectives to examine the service integration process. Drawing on the works of Hood (1998), Lynn (2006), Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), Argyris and Schon (1978a), Bardach (1998), Lave and Wenger (1991), and new empirical data, this research aims to make an important theoretical contribution to the academic debate on the applicability of Western managerial reforms in transitional countries and the appropriateness of the NPM theory, as well as concepts such as “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” in the analysis of the OSS policy implementation.

Firstly, the research poses fundamental questions about the political context in which NPM reforms can take place. Can significant improvements in service quality be achieved as a result of Western managerial reforms in the context of hierarchical, corrupt and inertial public sectors? Secondly, the research explores if organisational learning takes places in the OSS as service integration is a learning process, and learning is a necessarily situated and non-linear subject (Bloom et al., 2008). Thirdly, is the concept of the “communities of practice” appropriate for use in the top-down, planned change environment? This thesis argues that service integration is best conceptualised not in structural or organisational terms, but that rather, integration is

more richly textured, encompassing accountability, the particular types of services integrated, sets of people, and the strategic framework.

Conclusions from this thesis should be of particular relevance to the growing literature on managerial reforms in the transitional context. Over the past decade, many post-communist countries have established a good record of creating effective administrative institutions (for example, the Baltic states), while others have failed dramatically (as illustrated earlier in this chapter). Unfortunately, current research mostly concentrates on the analysis of successful reformers, neglecting countries that carry out reforms but fail to improve bureaucratic quality. Focusing on the failing reforms, however, is as important as considering the champions of NPM reforms, because this may reveal faulty strategies, targets, and criteria and hence, practices to avoid. This thesis argues that Kazakhstan's OSS policy is aimed to improve bureaucratic effectiveness, efficiency, and professionalism - the primary ingredients of NPM - but also to strengthen the executive grip on power. It is suggested that when analysing NPM reform programs, it is important to examine the political interests that promote these projects as well as the pre-existing capacity and efficacy of administrative institutions.

The empirical significance of this research

This research generated rich empirical data based on examination of the work practices of the managers and front-line employees, views of the government officials from the coordinating authority and service users, as well as extensive secondary data in the form of policy documents, survey reports and mass media publications (see Table 6).

Table 6: Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Qualitative data	Quantitative data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcripts of semi-structured interviews with 11 OSS managers, 5 senior managers from the MJ. • Notes from four week observations in two case organisations. • Notes of unstructured interviews with 25 front-line employees. • Notes of web-discussions by the OSS service users. • Notes of views by 15 local municipality managers on their evaluation of OSS policy implementation in the regions. • Notes from two official meetings with the managers from the OSS and MJ. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy documents (legislation, policy reports, service standards and regulations). • Survey of literature on NPM, service integration and organisational learning. • Mass media publications.

The first significant area of this empirical study is the nature of service integration processes, which are non-linear, problematic and highly contextual. Notwithstanding the fast growth of Internet-based e-government arrangements, physical customer service centres remain a very important means to reduce administrative burdens for citizens and businesses. This is partly because physical OSS possess qualities, such as providing opportunities for personal advice and guidance, and high level of accountability through personal involvement of staff, that Web-based single-window arrangements cannot offer. This thesis represents the first empirical research on public service integration in the Kazakhstani context, which remains unexplored for the academic and policy-making communities. Secondly, using the case of the OSS, this research analyses the process of adaptation of NPM reforms in the transitional context. In particular, the research project explores implementation of the NPM principles, such as decentralizing management and customer-orientation. In doing so this research is able to critically assess why and how the implementation of the NPM ideas has been constrained in Kazakhstan. The third important area of this empirical study is the analysis of the appropriateness of concepts such as “organisational

learning” and “communities of practice” in the Kazakhstani context of public service integration. Here empirical data helps to explore the values, perceptions and experiences of the OSS managers and front-line staff. Overall, this thesis aims to offer a significant empirical contribution to the academic and policy debate on public service integration and adaptation of managerial ideas in the transitional context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Chapters 2 and 3 aim to develop a conceptual framework for the analysis of public service integration. A transformation of public services towards more market-based and customer-oriented models forms a set of challenges to the hierarchical structure and inertial top-down culture of the traditional bureaucracy. The literature review illustrates that the public service integration process is a complex concept contesting old working practices, accountabilities, spans of control, identities and roles. It involves multidimensional issues related to decentralizing management by “letting the managers manage” and building “flatter relations”, changing the focus of the government towards customer needs, ability of managers to encourage and experience critical thinking on the traditional ways of working and renegotiation of professional identities.

Hence, given complexity of service integration processes this research requires a multidisciplinary approach involving social policy, public policy and organisational studies. Firstly, this thesis examines NPM theories (Hood, 1991; Lan and Rosenbloom, 1992; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004) to improve the understanding of the context within which service integration policy has been implemented. Secondly, the research explores the appropriateness of the concepts of “organisational learning” (Argyris and Schon, 1978a), “situated learning” within “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and “communities of coping” (Korczynski, 2002a). Together, three bodies of literature, social policy, public management and organisational studies, provide the conceptual framework for my analysis (see Table 7).

Table 7: Conceptual Framework of the Research

Focus	Discipline	Relevant theory
Service quality agenda	Social policy	Service integration theory
Decentralising management	Public policy	New Public Management
Customer-orientation		
Cultural change		
Learning	Organisational	Single and double loop learning
Challenges of customer service	studies	Situated learning
Change of identities		Communities of practice
		Communities of coping

Derived in parts from the literature review and synthesis of the key concepts, which are discussed in the chapters 2 and 3, this conceptual framework helps to guide the analysis of implementation of service integration policy in the transitional context and organise the research findings. Hence, this thesis analyses contextual factors that influence and shape service modernisation reform in Kazakhstan by exploring institutional, administrative and technical capacities, as well as cultural patterns in the public sector. In particular, the research examines policy implementation by identifying key actors, understanding their motivations, behaviour and role in shaping service design, power dimensions, and exploring the parallel tracks of attempts to democratise Kazakhstan by reducing corruption and improving service quality. This work also examines the service integration process by exploring structure, strategy, methods of performance control and personnel policies of the single-window centres and their appropriateness for integration goals. The particular emphasis is put on the development of the relationships between the traditional bureaucracy and customer-oriented bureaucracy, which involved challenging existing work practices, norms and professional identities. This research aims to explore if, and what type of learning has taken place within the single-window centres; how the front-line staff learnt new working practices and service arrangements, and renegotiated their professional identities towards customer-oriented bureaucracy.

This chapter begins by reviewing the literature on NPM theories (section 2.1) and aims at improving understanding of the context in which this research takes place with particular emphasis on the key elements of NPM, such as decentralising management and customer-orientation (section 2.2). The findings of previous research enable me to construct explanations of the challenges faced by Kazakhstan in implementing managerial reforms as a transitional country (section 2.3). The final section 2.4 summarises the key issues learnt from the review of the NPM literature, which are helpful to understand the concept of managerial reforms and constraints faced by the transitional countries. In the next chapter (Chapter 3), literature on service integration and organisational learning is analysed, the arguments of the literature review from Chapters 2 and 3 are drawn together, and the basis for building a conceptual framework for the analysis of public service integration in the transitional context is determined.

2.1 THEORIES OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Over the last two decades, many developed countries have implemented the NPM model. Following the paths of developed countries and under pressure imposed by the international donor agencies, many developing countries have been trying to reshape their administrative systems along the logic of NPM. Kazakhstan has not been immune to the international trends of NPM and has adopted a managerial agenda as a key priority in their current administrative reform. While the adoption of NPM practices seems to have been beneficial in some cases, the previous research shows that there are both potential for and real limitations to applying such elements in transitional countries. The limited experience of NPM in such states suggests that there are *institutional* and *cultural* problems, whose persistence constrains implementation. This section explores the concept of NPM and the question of whether and to what extent NPM theory can contribute to the understanding of managerial reforms in the transitional context of Kazakhstan. It is argued that country-specific contexts influence the dynamics of NPM reforms as policy implementation is firmly embedded in the societal, political and economic circumstances of a particular point in time. The proponents of NPM see managerial

reforms as providing a future for smaller, fast-moving service delivery organizations that would be kept lean by the pressures of competition and that would need to be user-responsive and outcome-oriented in order to survive. By contrast, the critics of NPM note concerns about the potential destabilizing effects of NPM, particularly for transitional countries, such as increasing social inequality, corruption and unmanageable change processes that could damage public service provision.

This section begins by analysing how NPM theories can contribute to understanding the impact of managerial reforms on government performance and service improvement. It reviews the findings of previous research both from developed and developing countries. Furthermore, it is emphasised that the analysis of managerial reforms can be broadened by considering the service integration process within the institutional context of customer service organizations in which learning is embedded. This suggests adopting a multi-level approach, combining an analysis of NPM, service integration and organisational learning theories. This approach may offer a fresh look, and as such it may feed back into the theoretical debate.

The large and growing literature on public sector management reforms in Western countries (for example, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) has emphasised that changes in the economic, social, political, technological and administrative environments combined to prompt and drive radical changes in public administration and management systems (Lane, 1997; Lynn, 2006). The central objective of change was improvement in the ways in which government is managed and services delivered, with emphasis on efficiency, economy and effectiveness.

Since the 1970s, the old administrative model has come under severe criticisms for various reasons. The first set of criticisms focused on major economic problems:

- governments were too large, consuming too many scarce resources;
- governments were involved in too many activities, whereas alternative means of provision existed for many of these; and growing inflation, excessive costs and excessive bureaucracies resulted from state intervention (Minogue, 1998; Hughes, 1998).

The second aspect of criticism relates to the pattern of administration. The traditional model of administration is rejected as being inefficient, costly, rigid, corrupt, unaccountable, and unsuitable to an age seeking more dynamic models of social and economic development (Hughes, 1998). Thus, these two criticisms have led the way for the emergence of a new model, with different titles, such as “new public management” (Hood, 1991), “market-based public administration” (Lan and Rosenbloom, 1992), “managerialism” (Pollitt, 1993; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004), “reinventing government” (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) and a “post-bureaucratic” model (Barzelay, 1992). Whatever the title is, they all provide a similar premise, although there are significant country-specific variations and NPM’s overall suitability for different regimes still remains uncertain (OECD, 1995).

The literature on public management reforms also points to the development and availability of ICT as providing the necessary tools and structures to make workable managerial reforms in the public sector (Greer, 1994). For example, refined information systems are pivotal to the principle of management decentralization through the creation of executive agencies. In order to decentralize and have greater accountability, it is important to have confidence in reported performance information (Greer, 1994). NPM reforms have also been “globalized” by change agents. These include large international management consultants and international financial institutions, all of which have been instrumental in the increasing “importation” of new management techniques from the private into the public sector. They have played an important role in packaging, selling and implementing NPM techniques (Greer, 1994).

From the above review of the literature we can draw a lesson that a combination of factors coincided to produce an irresistible pressure for management reforms in the public services in developed market economies. Changes in the political context and the search for efficiency and effectiveness in public services were key driving forces for change toward more market-oriented policies. From the late 1970s this shift in the Western countries was imposed on developing regions, particularly in countries that embarked on International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank-supported structural adjustment programmes.

A review of the literature suggests that NPM is not a homogenous whole but rather has several, sometimes overlapping elements, representing trends in public management reforms in different countries. Its components and features have been identified by a number of writers, including Hood (1991, 1998), Ferlie (1996), Flynn (1993), Lynn (2006), Pollitt (1993), and Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004). For example, it is worth noting that Hood's original conception of NPM did not explicitly feature the issue of customer-orientation. The Citizen's Charter brought the issue of consumers to prominence and has since become a key feature of most NPM discussions. Osborne and Gaebler's approach also contains some important differences in emphasis from the general NPM approach. Unlike the ideologically driven NPM underpinned by the "public bad – private good" ethos in the United Kingdom (Talbot, 1994: 11), Osborne and Gaebler assert their belief in government. They also assert that privatisation is not the only, or often the most appropriate, solution, and that in some cases, bureaucracies work better (for example, in social security). Beyond these differences, there is much in common with the different views on NPM.

As highlighted above, the proponents of NPM see the traditional bureaucratic model as rigid, rule-bound, slow moving bureaucracies that are costly, inefficient and unresponsive to their users. Public services were provider-dominated, especially in the case of professionalised provision (for example, education and health care) where powerful, autonomous professions defended vested interests and could not be held to account (Pollitt, 1993). In contrast, NPM was presented as providing a future for smaller, fast-moving service delivery organisations that would be kept lean by the pressures of competition and that would need to be user-responsive and outcome-oriented in order to survive. These organisations would be expected to develop flatter internal structures and devolve operational authority to front-line managers. With a downsized staff, many of whom are on performance-related contracts, many services would now have to be contracted out. Professional dominance would be minimized to allow for the substitution of more cost-effective mixes of staff. Leading on from this the following section explores two of the key NPM principles on decentralising management and customer-orientation which may be particularly relevant for public

service integration policies aimed at delegating operational service delivery functions from the central to the local level, and building customer-oriented government.

2.2 DECENTRALISING MANAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER-ORIENTATION

The Kazakhstani OSS policy encourages decentralising management as part of the effort to “debureaucratize” the public services (Ingraham, 1996: 255), as well as “delayer” the hierarchies within them. The key concern here is “whether managers are free to manage their units in order to achieve the most efficient output” (Hood, 1991: 5-6). This aspect of NPM has taken several forms, which are outlined here and help to bring useful insights in analysing service integration processes in the transitional context.

There are several related elements of management decentralization, which can be inferred from the NPM literature. The first, and the key trend, is that traditionally huge and monolithic public bureaucracies are downsizing, contracting out functions and breaking up internally into more autonomous business units or executive agencies (Pollitt, 1993; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). This involves a split between a small strategic policy core and large operational arms of government with increased managerial autonomy (Greer, 1994). Agencies are then required to conduct their relations with each other and with the central departments on a contractual basis rather than through the traditional hierarchy, i.e. they relate on an arms-length basis. In practice, executive agencies have meant structural changes in the organisation of government. These agencies have greater managerial flexibility in the allocation of human resources in return for greater accountability for results. The United Kingdom, United States, Australia and New Zealand provide some good examples of executive agencies. The development of executive agencies has been accompanied by the delegation of authority to senior management in public agencies – giving top management freedom to manage, with clear responsibility and accountability, and reducing the management role of the centre.

Devolving budgets and financial control is the second element of decentralised management and an important complement to the creation of executive agencies. This may take the form of creating budget centres or spending units. Devolving budgets and financial control involves giving managers increased control over budgets for which they are held responsible (Walsh, 1995). This usually goes with the setting of explicit targets for decentralised units.

Organisational unbundling is the third element of management decentralisation. It involves the delayering of vertically integrated organisations, i.e. replacing traditional “tall hierarchies” with flatter and more responsive structures formed around specific processes, such as the paying of benefits as in the United Kingdom (Ferlie, 1996; Pollitt, 1993).

The fourth element of decentralised management is downsizing, i.e. rationalising the public sector in order to achieve a “leaner” (smaller or compact) and “meaner” (cost-effective) public service. This has taken different forms, for example, sub-contracting government activities to private providers. Downsizing arises from the concern for the size and cost of public sector employment. Rapid expansion of civil service employment reflected a high degree of government intervention in the economy, as well as practices such as guaranteeing employment to new graduates, and the use of employment for political patronage.

The fifth dimension of decentralised management is the separation of provision from the production of public services. This separation of provision from production implies making a clearer distinction (organisational and financial) between defining the need for and paying for public services (the indirect provider role) and actually producing those services (the direct provider role).

The sixth and final dimension of management decentralisation is the adoption of new forms of corporate governance and a move to a board of directors model in the public services. The benefits and the objectives of management decentralisation may vary from one organisational context to another. However, the economic and

administrative cases for management decentralisation rest on bringing service delivery closer to consumers, improving the central government's responsiveness to public demands, improving the efficiency and quality of public services, and empowering lower units to feel more involved and in control (Larbi, 1999). It is also meant to reduce overload and congestion at the centre and speed up operational decision making and implementation by minimising the bottlenecks associated with over-centralisation of powers and functions at one or two points in the hierarchy of a public service organisation of ministry. Thus, management decentralisation seeks to increase the operational autonomy of line managers and agencies, leaving only broad policy guidelines to be worked out at the centre. It also entails flatter internal hierarchies.

Another component of the NPM theory, which holds a central place in the debate on managerial reforms is customer-orientation. The main aim of the service integration policy is to make services more transparent, accessible, affordable and usable. Through structural adjustment, use of techniques of quality and performance management, and a shift in language, recipients of public services are to become something akin to customers of the commercial sector. The rationale is the shift of power from providers to users of public services, which is argued to produce benefits in flexibility, quality and cost effectiveness (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Reformers face a number of challenges in repositioning public service recipients as customers. One of the reasons is the complexity of the new role, wherein the "user as customer" typically must be integrated with more traditional positions occupied by recipients. Public service users typically get standardized entitlements and owe legal obligations of some kind. In many spheres, and for many users, public provision remains the only option. Critics have pointed out the contradictions between these positions and the concept of customer sovereignty, with its associations to individual preference, choice and power (Alford, 2002; Foster and Hoggett, 1999), rendering any meaningful application of the customer concept in the public sector a complicated proposition at best. Reformers also address all the usual problems and challenges of change in organisations, including effective communication and the shifting of entrenched practices, attitudes and values (Burnes, 1992; Kanter et al., 1992).

Front-line workers represent the most significant internal target of these efforts. Reformers can design and impose initiatives intended to customerise public sector organisations, but they cannot directly enact the appropriate treatment of recipients. For this, they must rely on front-line staff, street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980), who must reconcile the new complexities of the role in their concrete interactions with customers. This raises an important question relevant for the service integration policy, of how government officials perceive and reposition themselves as public service providers, and citizens as service users. The application of management decentralisation and customer-orientation as key elements of NPM in varying contexts and in different forms suggests that there are different forms of constraints for policy implementation, which are discussed in the following section (2.3).

2.3 IMPLEMENTATION CONSTRAINTS

Despite the tremendous appeal of the NPM, the new model has not been welcomed uncritically. There are some *institutional constraints* with implications for the capacity of central agencies to manage the process in both developed and developing countries. Questions are raised as to whether the new model has sufficient conceptual coherence to provide an alternative to public administration as either a theoretical construct for academic research or an approach to the management of public services (McLaughlin and Osborne, 2002). Doubts are raised regarding its universal applicability. Bodies, such as the World Bank and the IMF have adopted it as a universal panacea for both public service and civil society failures across the world (McCourt, 2002). Particularly, the applicability of the new model in the developing world has faced as many problems as developing countries in that they do not fulfil some preconditions for its effective implementation (Minogue, 1998; Larbi and Bangura, 2006). Sobis and de Vries (2009) argue that much of the technical assistance, from Western Europe to Central Europe, during its transition period was ineffective due to the structure in which technical assistance was embedded and the lack of care from international consultants with regard to the impact of their work.

There are also *socio-cultural constraints* in reforming the administrative system along the NPM model. NPM initiatives are difficult to implement where there are social and cultural inertia (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001; Ray, 1999). State-civil society relations also remain problematic. The civil society has not been able to put enough pressure on the state apparatus to implement reforms (Sozen and Shaw, 2002). Concerns about corruption have risen in recent years, together with growing evidence of its detrimental impact on government effectiveness (Abed and Davoodi, 2000; Tomaszewska and Shah, 2000). Conceptually, NPM is expected to reduce opportunities for corruption (Von Maravic, 2003). Andrews and Shah (2005) integrate these ideas into a common framework of citizen-centred governance. They argue that citizen empowerment holds the key to enhanced accountability and reduced opportunities for corruption. Others disagree with such conclusions, and argue that NPM could lead to higher corruption rather than greater accountability, because the tendering for service delivery and the separation of purchasers from providers may lead to increased rent-seeking behaviours and enhanced possibilities for corruption (Batley, 1999; Von Maravic, 2003). Some argue that decentralised management leads to weaker vertical supervision from higher levels and the inadequacy of mechanisms to exert controls over decentralized agencies (Scharpf, 1997). This loss in vertical accountability is seen as a source of enhanced opportunities for corruption.

The empirical literature on corruption identifies the following key drivers based on in-depth country studies of developing, transition and industrial countries (see Gurgur and Shah, 2002; Tomaszewska and Shah, 2000):

1. *The legitimacy of the state as the guardian of the “public interest” is contested.* The line between what is public and what is private is blurred, so that abuse of public office for private gain is a routine occurrence.
2. *The rule of law is weakly embedded.* Public sector corruption thrives where laws apply to some but not others and where enforcement of the law is often used as a device for furthering private interests rather than protecting the public interest.

3. *Institutions of participation and accountability are ineffective.* Societies in which the level of public sector corruption is relatively low usually have strong institutions of participation and accountability (for example, citizens' charter, the judiciary, the legislature) that control abuses of power by public officials.
4. *The commitment of national leaders to combating corruption is weak.* Widespread corruption endures in the public sector when national authorities are either unwilling or unable to address it forcefully.

Chapter 9 analyses the drivers of corruption in the Kazakhstani context and examines different forms of illegal practices adopted in the single-window centres. The final section of this chapter summarises the key issues that we learnt from the previous research of NPM reforms, which may be helpful for analysis of managerial reforms in the transitional context such as Kazakhstan.

2.4 SUMMARY

What have we learnt from the previous research on implementation of managerial reforms both in developed and developing countries? There is evidence that although public management has had a significant influence on the design of reforms in developing countries, “the actual implementation is rather thin on the ground and the outcomes are uncertain” (Larbi and Bangura, 2006: 277). In developing countries the NPM model has been considered as a necessity for implementing economic liberalization policy initiatives in order to take advantages of globalisation (World Bank, 2002). Transitional countries are still more blind to initial sketchiness of the ideas, unexpected erosion of the expectations and the high number of questions leaving the number of available answers far behind. As an outcome of NPM many public organisations in pro-NPM Western countries became more autonomous, but it also meant a greater fragmentation of service delivery, policy making and implementation. Unfortunately, these aspects are often not regarded and discussed by countries in transition.

The approaches outlined in this chapter widen the analytical perspective. As such, they potentially provide a lever for analysing managerial reforms in the transitional context. They do so either by broadening the understanding of NPM reform itself, by pointing to the complex nature of political, societal and cultural changes in the process of managerial reforms. So far it has been argued that culture-specific contexts tend to constrain rather than enable the analysis of public service reforms. These difficulties are further exacerbated when pursuing a case study approach employed in this research project, because of the cultural specificity of Kazakhstan as a transitional and post-communist country.

The literature suggests that there are some preconditions for the successful implementation of the NPM approach. There should be a reasonable level of economic development and experience of the operations of markets, since NPM principles are essentially market-oriented. A well-developed judicial system is required to provide the rule of law. The new model assumes that the basic administrative processes are in order within the wider administrative system. They work as a foundation upon which a market-oriented system such as NPM can be implemented on the basis of a control-oriented system. These external controls are the building block for a formal, rule-based and honest public sector. The system also encourages managers to internalise a public ethic of proper behaviour (Schick, 1998). Once these basic conditions are fulfilled, central controllers tend to ease the regulations by giving line managers discretion in operating their programmes.

Another precondition for the successful implementation of NPM programmes is *state capacity* (Hughes, 1998). State capacity implies a condition where the state is able to take any reform measure decisively. This state capacity is thus characterised by *institutional, technical, administrative and political factors* (Wallis and Dollery, 2001). *Institutional capacity* is marked by the ability of these countries to uphold the authority of governments, to legislate and implement laws and to hold public officials accountable in terms of these laws (Wallis and Dollery, 2001: 251). *Technical capacity* is evident when key decision-making bodies managed by qualified people are insulated from the pressure of unproductive clientelist groups (Wallis and Dollery, 2001: 252). *Administrative capacity* is characterised by the

state's ability to undertake basic administrative functions and provide basic human services. This is particularly critical in so far as the NPM reform package is concerned. *Political capacity* refers to the ability of the state to mediate conflict, respond to citizen demands, allow for the representation of interests, and provide opportunities for effective political participation at different levels. Where the developed world fulfils most of these requirements, many developing countries do not.

Dunleavy and Hood (1994) note concerns among traditional bureaucrats or "hierarchists" about the potential destabilizing effects of NPM if the processes of change should get out of control, become unmanageable and do irreversible damage to the provision of public services. Critics of NPM also point to increasing inequality, as market-type mechanisms produce "market niche-seeking" behaviour by public service providers (Pollitt, 1993). Thus, the cultural and organisational change in social provision, expressed in the concepts of markets and individualism, may arguably create conditions of social exclusion. Such reforms may therefore harm those in most need of state provision: the poor and the vulnerable.

The critique of NPM (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994) also notes that NPM reform may promote self-interest and corruption as policy makers and senior bureaucrats opt for privatisation and contracting out because of increased opportunities for rent-seeking and other forms of unethical behaviour. Critics argue that NPM has led to falling ethical standards in public life, with increasing incidences of greed, favouritism and conflicting interests. For developing countries, where patronage systems are more prevalent and accountability mechanisms are weak, the adoption of NPM may lead to more abuses and the arbitrary use of discretion.

Managerial reform in Kazakhstan as a transitional country characterised by a patronage system and clanism (Cummings, 2005; Duvanova, 2008; Emrich-Bakenova, 2009; Perlman and Gleason, 2007; Schatz, 2004) is a particularly interesting case in this respect and offers potential to explore whether its origin provides explanation for the shape of reforms, which have taken place and the ways of implementation. Pollitt (2003: 38) argues that while public management ideas

“have had a wide influence”, and there are “certainly broad trends in ideas”, the interpretation and implementation of reforms have been patchy, messy, diverse and reversible. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) offer “a model of influences on public management reform” which shows interactions between: background socioeconomic influences, political pressures and features of the administrative system itself. The model, they argue, allows for “considerable variation between countries ... in the sense that each country has its own distinctive political and administrative system” (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004: 37).

Hellsten and Larbi (2006) show that, indeed, cultural patterns in the public at large influence the ethical performance of the civil service in developing countries. Although they reject the view that some national cultures are more tolerant of misconduct in the public sector than others, they suggest that corruption in parts of Africa and Asia emerges from a collectivist cultural tradition that conflicts with formal, bureaucratic institutions. In such cultures, personal relations are particularly important both as a value and as a means of survival; individualistic principles of market economies are regarded foreign. However, Hellsten and Larbi (2006: 138) also admit that contextual factors are important for institutional performance. They note that one of the reasons why public servants in developing countries are sometimes too inclined to engage in corruption is due to the fact that formal institutions do not perform their duties properly.

Both institutional and socio-cultural factors contribute to the weaknesses and failures of reforms in developing countries. Overall lessons from the previous research is that the political, institutional, technological and cultural factors pose significant constraints to the applicability of NPM reforms from developed democracies to transitional countries. Therefore, it is important to explore and analyse state capacity and national culture of Kazakhstan as a case study country in terms of implementation of public service integration.

Looking across post-communist Eastern Europe and Eurasia, it would be hard to find a place that did not experience at least some kind of bureaucratic transformation. Seen from a perspective of bureaucratic efficacy, probity, and capacity, however, the region exhibits remarkable variation. Between the extremes of the lean and efficient bureaucracies of the Baltic states and the ineffective and corrupt civil servants of Georgia and Moldova lays a wide variety of institutions with a varying degree of accountability, transparency, professionalism, and effectiveness (Kaufman, 2006). Given this immense variation in performance, it is rather surprising that most post-communist administrative reform projects are remarkably similar in their rhetoric and design. They all call for greater professionalism, separation from political authorities, performance-based rewards, meritocratic promotions, accountability, and anticorruption measures. While seemingly straightforward and highly desirable, NPM reform could have some unexpected outcomes for transitional countries. Since NPM is followed by popular slogans like “better quality for less costs”, it is easy to fall into its traps, especially after the Soviet regime during which involvement of citizens and service quality improvement were not the issues under discussion. The question is whether NPM just leads transitional countries to the same pitfalls, but just through different ways?

On one hand, NPM is aimed for very useful actions and processes like involving multiple stakeholders, measuring and managing performance, empowering citizens, but on the other hand a general understanding of what is “public service quality” and “how to improve the service” should take place before that. If this is not the case, the new systems might grow out of control rather quickly and start to work against their purpose. Policy implementation might get out of hand even faster and further than during the communist period. If during the Soviet era there were at least formal bureaucracies in place regardless if they were effective or not, then during NPM era there are mostly autonomous self-governing networks that are much more difficult to be managed.

The preceding sections have looked at the ways in which NPM theories address the issues of managerial reforms and the extent to which they can contribute to a case study analysis of the public service integration. Universal application ignores conceptual ambiguity and hides the significance of specific contexts of public services (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). The conclusions to be drawn from this analysis are two-fold: the framework of NPM does not provide ‘ready-made’ solutions to the problems outlined above and the case study analysis in particular. The approaches outlined by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) and Hellsten and Larbi (2006) appear to be more suitable to the present research: they acknowledge the differences between countries and open up the way for a more empirically-oriented analysis of managerial reforms, as opposed to the testing of the validity of an ideal type. In so doing the analytical perspective is widened and the possibility of arriving at a more refined understanding of public service changes and the phenomenon of NPM itself is opened up. The core of this argument, then, is to begin with empirical analysis. It suggests the need for a *theoretically informed map* in which public service integration can be located. This attempts to address the dilemma that a definition of NPM is both a prerequisite for, and the outcome of the analysis. Implementation of managerial reforms is understood in dynamic terms, notably as a political struggle between different actors including the government itself. By stressing the role of the government this type of approach also encourages an analysis of the wider political, social and cultural context in which the Kazakhstani single-window centres operate. The importance of these contextual factors is also highlighted by the case study perspective. This suggests broadening the case study analysis of the managerial reforms by exploring public service integration, of which the single-window approach is an integral part. With this in mind, findings from the previous research in service integration and possible conceptual tools such as “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” are now discussed further in Chapter 3.

3. SERVICE INTEGRATION AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

This chapter aims to continue to explore different ways of conceptualising service integration. Whilst the previous chapter provides a discussion on the NPM literature, this chapter reviews the relevant management science literature to analyse service integration. These range from understanding service integration as policy to examining the political implications of the managerial reforms. The concept of service integration (section 3.1) may provide a framework for exploring how the single-window policy is embedded in service integration, and for examining the underlying power dimensions and cultural changes. This requires broadening the focus of the analysis and, it is argued, that the concept of service integration can be used as a complementary conceptual tool. It can account for the multiple institutions, actors and, particularly, levels potentially involved in the governance of service integration. Furthermore, learning is an integral part of service integration. Section 3.2 provides the discussion of the concepts such as “organisational learning”, “communities of practice” (CoP) and “communities of coping”. It is argued that a synthesis of the concepts – NPM, service integration and organisational learning – can be used to build a suitable conceptual framework for analysing public service integration in the transitional context such as that represented in the case of Kazakhstan.

3.1 THE CONCEPT OF SERVICE INTEGRATION

This section looks at how different theorists have sought to explain the service integration processes and occurrence of organisational learning. This is important because popular literature on policy and management, for instance, often focus upon knowledge management within organisations, without explaining how learning occurs, what knowledge is, or by which processes learning organisations and learning regions are created and sustained (see for example, Toffler, 1990; Reich, 1991).

Service integration is framing policy debate around public service modernisation. Expressed variously as partnerships, joined-up-government or holistic services, integration strategies aim to alter the interface between the diversity of public services, addressing issues of access, equity, efficiency and effectiveness. This research interrogates the meaning and challenges of service integration, focusing upon public service delivery through single-window arrangements in the transitional context. Bardach (1998) and Bloom et.al. (2008) argue that integration is best conceptualised not in structural or organisational terms, but rather that, integration is more richly textured encompassing accountability, the particular nature of services integrated, sets of people, and the strategic framework. Bardach (1998) highlight that integration is a learning process, and learning is necessarily situated and a non-linear subject.

Bardach (1998) characterises service integration as shared strategies, coordinating processes, without necessarily pooling resources or establishing new organisational forms. Rather it is based on trust between delivery agents, without emphasis on longer-term radical service remodelling. Organisational modelling, trajectories and terminological contests dominate European literature on integration. Thistlethwaite's (2004: 16) guide for the Integrated Care Network contrasts integration with fragmentation as a single system of service planning and provision put in place and managed together by partners (parent bodies) who nevertheless remain legally independent, uniting mission, culture, management, budgets, accommodation, administration and records, and operating at any level of constituent organisations. He envisions integration as deeper than coordination between autonomous organisations, creating a new partnership organisation delivering services via a continuum from autonomy to coordination and integration.

Hudson (2002: 6) argues that structural integration evidently does not guarantee well-coordinated practice on the ground. Perri et al. (2002) counter-poses holism to fragmented services, defining integration as shared goals in relation to shared problems, rather than particular organisational forms or coordination mechanisms. Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) stress organisational collaboration as opposed to

organisational mergers. Little wonder that the practice of service integration is so little evaluated when the basic terms remain contested (Bell et al., 2008).

Policy implementation is best guided by strategy - a long-term overview of goals within a particular risk environment. Purposive organisation mobilises resources around privileged outcomes: hierarchy and network choices. Public sector organisational forms are more constrained than those in the private sector, being prescribed by organisational boundaries, statutory duties, areas of operation and statutory accountabilities. The purpose of public service integration is access, efficiency and effectiveness. Moore's (1995) argument for public value as a wide base from which to measure performance does not obviate the need for performance measurement: it defines a wider measurement base (Perrey et. al. 2004). Thus, integration is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Integrated ways-of-working contest old accountabilities. Romzek et. al. (1987) identify four types of public accountability: bureaucratic (internal), legal, professional and political, the blending of which is contextual and situated. Adherence to standard operating procedures can protect the risk-averse bureaucrat and undermine policy objectives (Power, 2007). Outside of settled structural forms, accountabilities depend on the competence and responsibility of individual agents and groups and wider stakeholder interpretations. Without clear measurement and management referencing external standards, integrative organisations may lack accountability.

Integrated, unlike new, organisations come with inherited middle management structures and roles. Middle managers, Bardach (1998) argues, may become responsible for decisions beyond their own knowledge domain, from different governances or ways-of-working. Middle managers in an integrating environment need to be fast learners: managing delivery (stability, existing roles and structures), whilst facilitating change (new structures and roles). This point is relevant for the role of the OSS managers as drivers for change in the public sector.

Resistance to change by middle managers may arise from uncertainty over their future, especially where hierarchy is flattening or where responsibility without power shifts downward. When costs and value-added are uncertain, attributing value to function is difficult, especially in a dynamic environment, hence the importance of IT in the integration processes. Information gathering in public services helps to evaluate equity, efficiency and overall public value (Milner, 2002). Agreeing data fields between agencies can be problematic and using databases to bring decisions to point-of-contact reaches deep into an organisation's processes. Aligning new services and new IT systems with new roles is also problematic, and has too often treated IT as autonomous, promoting technical integration without referencing services. Databases are social and technical constructs and pose ethical issues. Negotiating shared new languages may be contested: Siehl et. al. (1991) refer to this a rite of integration.

IT is critical to service integration, supporting shared assessments and tracking costs and value flows. However, the slowest partner can become a reverse salient. The OSS policy has placed high expectations on the use of IT, whereas, the literature suggests that IT investment often fails technically to give return on the investment - information gathering may conflict with inherited governances privileging particular data (Perrey et. al. 2004). Building IT capacity to a high level of integratedness is time consuming and expensive and often results in tensions between process cost reduction and adding richness into service products – in short, people's ways-of-working.

Organisations are composed of people with competences and motivation to lead, manage and deliver services, using changing knowledge domains, and negotiating new identities, spans of control and trust. Trust (risking harm by exposing vulnerability) lowers search and transaction costs. When organisations integrate, they re-balance price, authority and trust (Bardach, 1998). Though practitioners may have informally worked together and learned trust, negotiating formal integration takes time and has unforeseen consequences. The following section explores theories of learning and their appropriateness for analysing public service integration.

3.2 LITERATURE ON LEARNING

This section provides a discussion of the literature on learning by examining the relevance of the conceptual tools such as “organisational learning”, “communities of practice” and “communities of coping” in the analysis of service integration in the transitional context.

The difference between traditional approaches to public sector reform, where authority is vested in hierarchy, and the concept of organisational learning is that the former is rooted in top-down technical regulations, while the latter is rooted in a belief that the solution to all problems facing the public service lies in the transformation of the public servants themselves. In a sense, organisational learning provides a bottom-up, people-centred framework, which aims to unlock the human potential in the public sector. Learning occurs in “communities of practice” and non-formal settings including skills and functional/numerical flexibility (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Alter et. al. (1993) argue that new regulatory and professional standards made to facilitate integration, are also learning opportunities. Interdisciplinary communities of practice can become a milieu for renegotiating language, roles and identities (Wenger, 1998). Co-location understandably enriches interaction and enhances learning. Locating diversity of service at the point of customer contact within the single-window centres entails service re-engineering, bringing forward information and decision-taking, challenging existing structures, and power and knowledge distribution. Problem-solving judgement making characterises professions giving individual professionals their identity (Torstendahl, 1990). Integration can threaten or strengthen professional identities. New learning and perhaps more difficult, new feelings involving changing attitudes towards functionality and cultural identity takes time (Wilson et al., 2004) precisely because the manager or professional is renegotiating the self in relation to others.

Easterby Smith (1999) suggests that organisational learning is a process of organisational transformation, and argues that individual and collective learning fostered by learning activities plays a key role to furthering this process. The

cognitive perspective of organisational learning takes on two approaches. The first views individual learning as a model for organisational action, where organisations are able to learn, presuming that they have identical or at least similar capacities to those of humans. However, these theories tend to identify learning processes without reference to organisational context (Chiva and Alegre, 2005).

Critics of this approach argue that the organisation is not human, and therefore human attributes such as “learning” and “thought” cannot be assigned to them (Easterby Smith et al., 2000: 785). The second approach proposes that organisational learning is individual learning within an organisational context (Bhatt, 2000a, 2002b). According to this approach, theories present organisational learning as more than the sum of the learning of individual members, with the role of organisational culture being to increase the desire of individuals to learn. In the following sections the theories of “single and double loop learning” as well as “communities of practice” and “communities of coping” are discussed in relation to service integration.

3.2.1 Single and Double Loop Learning

The theory of single and double loop learning introduced by Argyris and Schon (1978a) takes account of the interplay between the actions and interactions of individuals and the actions and interactions of higher-level entities such as departments, divisions or groups of managers (Argyris, 1999). Single loop learning is described by Argyris and Schon (1978a) as a process where errors are detected and corrected in a continuous improvement process. The individual does not challenge taken for granted assumptions, which underpin the way things are done in the organisation. This level of learning questions *how* things are done in organisations, but does not challenge *why*. Senge (1990) parallels this approach through his definition of “*adaptive*” learning, where individuals develop capabilities to manage situations through making improvements and amendments. This type of learning tends to be limited to training needs arising out of an organisation’s requirement to

have individuals do a job properly, within the systems that govern how the organisation is controlled.

Double loop learning as presented by Argyris and Schon (1978a) entails individuals questioning and challenging the success recipes of the organisation, leading to a deeper level of understanding and reassessment of values and assumptions. The role of managers is assumed to be fundamental at this level, to encourage such questioning and challenging as well as facilitating the contexts which enable individuals to engage in risk taking activities and the resulting learning that takes place. Senge (1990) refers to this level of learning as “*generative*” learning, which focuses on developing new perspectives, options and possibilities.

Lyons (1985) argues that a basic requirement if learning is to take place is a climate, which encourages, facilitates and rewards learning, with particular emphasis on the manager’s role. However, one of the biggest learning dilemmas facing most organisations currently is how to get middle and senior managers to learn how to change and think differently (Argyris and Schon, 1996b) as radically different managerial approaches are needed if increasingly ineffective controls are to be halted (Senge, 1990). What is required to facilitate individual and organisational learning is the commitment to learning and related management capability throughout an organisation’s hierarchy.

Senge in *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) and *The Dance of Change* (1999) articulates how challenges inside an organisation, which stifle innovation can be countered by the diffusion of learning across boundaries, an analysis of assumptions and an understanding of the life cycle of change. These books suggest that only by learning faster than the competition can organisations stay ahead. The focus on systems thinking involves both an understanding of larger “systems” but also the discipline of looking for the patterns and connections underlying complexity.

Argyris (1999: 7) argues that individuals are the only proper subjects of learning and that if organisational learning means anything, it means learning on the part of individuals who happen to function in an organisational setting. However, in practice, Argyris (1999) further maintains that individual learning is rarely encouraged by organisational members, and if learning is encouraged it is normally within the parameters of the individual's job. Argyris and Schon (1978a) assume that managers are experienced at single loop learning; at performing well within their sphere of competence. However, this in itself contributes to a fundamental constraint in their moving to a level of double loop learning. The assumption is that managers who engage in single loop learning seldom experience failure as they stick to the tried and tested, resulting in a lack of learning opportunities; this in itself creates defensive mechanisms to compensate for any failure that may occur (Argyris and Schon, 1978a). In general the theory from this traditional paradigm argues that managers tend to avoid criticism, blame others or ignore problems, precisely when the ability to learn is most vital. In short, their ability to learn shuts down precisely at the moment they need it most (Argyris and Schon, 1996b). In particular, the compliance culture of the post-communist countries tends to stifle staff initiative and communications – both critical attributes of organisational learning and service improvement.

Given these perspectives, those managers who endeavour to commit to the learning of individuals, providing them with opportunities to learn and enhance their capability, face issues of loss of control, status and power. As a result, managers may often behave in ways that maximize their security and status in role, usually at the expense of the learning of opportunities of their staff. Field (1997) argues that as individuals move into the role of the empowered learner, managers feel insecure and feel the workplace to be unstable and unpredictable. Therefore, managers tighten control by undermining activities likely to facilitate learning and when controls become too tight, individuals hold back, resulting in manager's loosening their controls.

The issues raised by the theory of single and double loop learning have a number of implications for the questions this research seeks to address and the research design adopted. The literature highlights the difference between single loop learning, which is planned, prescribed, learned and performed without question, challenge or generative learning, and double loop learning which entails individuals questioning and challenging the organisation, leading to a deeper level of understanding and a reassessment of values and assumptions. The role of managers is assumed to be fundamental to encourage questioning and challenging, and facilitating contexts which enable individuals to engage in risk taking activities and resulting learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978a). Therefore, within a centralised political context, such as in Kazakhstan, the analysis of learning experiences of those who are involved in service integration process is particularly important.

Issues around organisational learning underline the importance of the key analytic themes addressed in the research on the impact of policy on service providers and service users, and defining and promoting service integration. Within the overall policy framework, the research is framed around experiences of the front-line service delivery. Two case studies in Astana are used to understand these experiences in more depth, and the interaction between responses at different levels, both at an individual level and at a more strategic organisational level.

The following section attempts to synthesise other explanatory theories: situated learning within “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and “communities of coping” (Korczynski, 2002a), which will add value to my conceptual framework in terms of focusing on localised work communities and conceptualisation of identities.

3.2.2 “Communities of Practice” and “Communities of Coping”

As indicated in the previous section, double-loop learning focuses on developing new perspectives and possibilities for the individual and transformation for the organisation. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning takes place within single, localised and small communities – “communities of practice” (CoP). At the core of situated learning theory is the assumption that learning and knowing are processes integral to everyday practice in the workplace, family and other social settings (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Learning and knowing cannot be separated from everyday practice; furthermore, learning cannot be isolated and then studied as if it were a discrete activity. Central to the literature around a situated perspective on learning is a focus on participation, identity, and practice (in communities or networks of practice), and the dynamics between them. As Lave and Wenger (1991) propose:

Conceiving of learning in terms of participation focuses attention on ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations ... [Learning is] an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice ... learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: they are aspects of the same phenomenon. (49, 53, 115)

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that participation is central to situated learning, since individuals develop their identities and practices according to the participatory opportunities available to them. Participation involves the way individuals understand, take part in, and subscribe to the social norms, behaviours and values of the communities in which they participate. The examples of CoP represent an apprentice-to-master model, where apprentices move from peripheral to full forms of participation. The early examples have since been elaborated. For example, Lave (2004) now uses the concepts of “newcomers” and “oldtimers” to denote an individual’s lifespan within a community. In a parallel development, Wenger (1998) has elaborated various forms of community participation: “peripheral” and “full” are now contrasted with “marginal”; non-legitimate forms of participation are introduced; and the overlapping nature of communities is explicitly acknowledged.

Situated learning theory brings a renewed focus on “identity”. “Learning” is concerned not only with developing ways of “knowing” in practice, but also with understanding who we are and what potential we have (Lave, 2004). A review of the literature reveals several conceptualisations of identity. These vary in their emphasis on structural or agential influences, their accounts of identity-development, and the possibility of stability around a single or multiple sense of self. Social identity theory argues that our sense of identity develops through the medium of the groups we belong to (or disassociate with): we “belong” to a small number of such groups and carry a small number of identities (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

The issue of possible multiple identity construction among front-line employees requires special attention, since individuals do strive to achieve a sense of coherence between their multiple identities (Giddens, 1991). This perspective seems to most closely fit with the proposition in situated learning theory that identities are continually evolving through participation in multiple communities of practice. To some extent, this continual reworking of identity arises because individuals participate in not one, but multiple communities and networks of practice. Each will have different norms of belonging and a different set of “typical” identities. Furthermore, individuals bring to these communities their early-socialised “dispositions” to act in similar ways across different contexts and communities (Mutch, 2003). The potential for identity conflict is therefore significant as individuals move between different communities. Identity conflicts may be particularly explicit in the service integration environment where government officials from different professions, departments and backgrounds attempt to build-up an integrated service. Nevertheless, in spite of this internal conflict, individuals may still seek to present particular or even new identities to outsiders. For example, the front-line employees may seek to project a coherent identity which they believe their clients want to see (for example, being professional and customer-oriented), and which is regulated by the managerialist discourses at their workplace and more generally.

In the context of situated learning, practice is always social practice (Wenger, 1998: 47) because it is the “historical and social context” that provides structure and meaning to what we do. Through participation, newcomers “gradually assemble a general idea of what constitutes the practices of the community” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 95). Ibarra (1999) suggests that individuals develop their practice by observing and initially imitating others within their community of practice, and by experimenting with and adapting their own practice. She calls this process “experimenting with provisional selves”, emphasizing the close relationship between the development of identities and practices. Situated learning theory elaborates on this argument by suggesting that the opportunities to observe, adapt, and experiment are dependent on the participatory opportunities available to the individual.

It is important to emphasise the potential interactional effects of participation and the development of new identities and practices in the single-window centres where the front-line employees are expected to adopt new working practices and service arrangements. By bringing together these constructs, learning can be considered as the development of identities and practice achieved through participation in communities of practice.

A number of research studies have explored the organisational characteristics and employment arrangements of customer service organisations (Callaghan and Thompson, 2002; Korczynski, 2002a; Mullholland, 2002). Volume is managed through task routinisation, and a sophisticated ICT architecture configured to distribute, manage and monitor clients, while service quality is managed through a mixture of behavioural management and human resource strategies. By these means, customer service organisations seek to balance the logics of efficiency and customer service. The tension between these goals is felt due to heightened visibility of cost trade-offs (Sturdy, 2001: 7; Wallace et al, 2000: 174). This tension unmasks a series of conflicts: between costs and quality, between flexibility and standardisation, and between constraining and enabling job design.

The front-line jobs have been characterised as “dead-end” with low status, poor pay and few career prospects. Moreover, the research has shown that much of the work is closely monitored, tightly controlled and highly routinised. Informational technology plays a critical part in this process: the speed of work can continuously be measured and the quality of interaction between the service provider and the customer can be assessed remotely and at management’s discretion. This “information panopticon” is said to continuously remind workers that, “although no manager may be physically present, every aspect of their performance may be ... constantly measured” (Macdonald and Sirianni, 1996). Not surprisingly, it has been suggested that this form of service delivery bears the hallmarks of an engineering model (Herzenberg et al, 1998). Tasks have been simplified, services must conform to predetermined design specification and the production process has been constructed to minimise labour costs.

A number of authors have developed theoretical approaches to the study of front-line service work that highlights the distinctiveness of this form of work. These authors have argued that there are difficulties involved in the simple application of bureaucratic principles of work organisation to jobs involving direct customer contact (Herzenberg et al., 1998). For example, Offe (1985) argued that it was difficult to simply bureaucratize front-line work because:

On the one hand, the particularity, individuality, contingency and variability (of the situations and needs of clients...) must be preserved... On the other hand, service labour must ultimately bring about a state of affairs which conforms to certain general rules. The definition of service labour ... draws attention to the processes of individuation and differentiation on the one hand and coordination and standardization requirements on the other (105-6).

Korczynski (2002a; 2003b) has further developed these ideas by arguing that much of contemporary service work is best analysed in relation to an ideal-type of the customer-oriented bureaucracy. The idea is that contemporary service work tends to be underpinned by dual logics of rationalisation and of customer-orientation, and that these logics potentially lie in contradiction to each other. Kerst and Holtgrewe (2001) suggest another theoretical way of looking at this idea of dual logics underpinning service work. They argue that it is useful to see front-line service work more

generally, as acting in a boundary-spanning role (Thompson, 1967) between the producing organisation and its customers.

The concept of “communities of coping” introduced by Korczynski (2002a) may be relevant for the analysis of the work practices within the Kazakhstani single-window centres. Korczynski (2002a) called customer service organisations “communities of coping” because they are challenged with two fundamentally contradictory logics: a need to be cost-efficient and a desire to be customer-orientated. On the one hand, organisations seek to reduce costs per customer transaction by increasing the speed of service, yet on the other they encourage their employees to be quality-orientated. Customers are seeking to obtain services that are adapted to their needs and requirements, yet at the same time efficient and inexpensive.

This approach suggests that traditional bureaucratic control in the form of the measurement and monitoring of the work process will be joined by the use of customer-related normative values (Korczynski, 2002a). This can be seen in the substantial shift in recruitment criteria for front-line jobs towards the importance of the candidate having the appropriate customer-focused personality and values. Such values will also be developed through socialisation, training and appraisal (Leidner, 1993).

This approach suggests important contradictions within management control at two levels. Firstly, there is the contradiction between the continued measurement/monitoring and the generation of normative values. While the former tends to rest more easily with low trust, command dynamics leading to compliance on the part of workers, the latter tends to be associated with high trust dynamics supporting active worker commitment (Fox, 1974). Potential contradictions take place within the use of customer-related norms. As Gabriel and Lang (1995: 9) suggest, the nature and definition of the customer is a contested terrain. This is coupled with the idea that control involving norms cannot be adequately understood as a simple top-down exercise in which management introduces certain norms within workers, who in turn adopt the norms unquestioningly (Kunda, 1992). Thus, analysis

of the work practices within the single-window centres must be sensitive to the active role of the employees in the creation of customer-related norms. The fact that management actions are underpinned by the dual logics of customer-orientation and efficiency means that they will prefer workers to identify with a collective, disembodied concept of the customer (Korczynski et al., 2000). However, the literature suggests that front-line workers may be more likely to identify with embodied individual customers, for interaction with specific customers may be an important arena for meaning and satisfaction from the work (Marshall, 1986; Williams, 1987). The Kazakhstani front-line workers' concept of the customer may work against management aims of meeting both quality and quantity performance targets. This research examines the issues of customer-related values, their use in control and their contradictions within the context of the Kazakhstani single-window centres.

Service work cannot be separated from the supplier. Customers care how services are delivered; the way in which employees display their feelings towards customers can have an important effect on the perceived quality of the interaction. It is becoming commonly accepted that customer service organisations are required to perform high levels of emotional labour (Mullholland, 2002; Taylor and Tyler, 2000). The concept of "emotional labour" which was popularised by the work of Hochschild (1983) into the way airline cabin crew are taught and told to manage their emotions in order to present a pleasant face is highly relevant for the front-line staff of the OSS. Staff must suppress feelings of tiredness or irritation and, Hochschild argues, if this is done consistently and in a concentrated way workers can move beyond "surface acting" and actually change their own emotions a process known as "deep acting".

The involvement of the customer as a third party brings a greater degree of complexity and uncertainty to the labour process. Although management may wish to standardise the behaviour of customers and limit their options, it is not always possible to achieve predictability and compliance in the service exchange. Where customers' requirements cannot easily be standardised, workers will require some degree of flexibility and discretion in negotiating their interactions.

Monitoring and standardisation of customer service is the dominant forms of control at the front-line organisations. However, tightly specified work regimes are often not sufficient to secure quality of service. Consequently, most organisations have sought to instill values of good customer service in their staff by way of cultural or normative control. Leidner (1993: 37) describes this as “transforming workers’ characters and personalities”. The aim is to develop an internalised commitment to quality service. This may be done through induction, training and performance appraisals. Callaghan and Thompson (2002) also point to the importance of recruitment, with customer service organisations focusing on personality traits and service-orientated attitudes.

Wallace et al (2000) have argued that one way of resolving the tension between service and efficiency is to adopt what they refer to as the “sacrificial human resource strategy”. Rather than resolving this tension by improving employee morale, organisational commitment or job satisfaction, employers deliberately sacrifice the wellbeing of staff, accepting “high levels of stress and emotional burnout of the front line staff, accompanied by high turnover”, as the price for maintaining high levels of service at low cost” (Wallace et al, 2000: 182). However, in order to achieve this result, managers must have access to a pool of skilled labour, jobs that require minimal organisational knowledge and the ability to closely monitor job performance. In concluding, this section has examined the concepts of “organisational learning”, “communities of practice” and “communities of coping” in relation to the research on working practices in customer-service organisations. The final section summarises the findings of the literature review on service integration and organisational learning.

3.3 SUMMARY

This section has highlighted a number of important issues learnt from the previous research on the service integration and organisational learning, and explains how these help to construct my analysis of the service integration processes within the transitional context. Service integration has different explanations in the academic literature, such as shared strategies, partnerships, joined-up-government, holistic services, organisational collaboration, trust. Significant arguments against integration include the visibility of financial control and accountability, clear control routes for policy makers and limited span-of-control of senior managers (Rhodes, 2000). Inter-organisational integration may introduce responsibilities beyond the competence of managers; raising for users issues of confidentiality, assessment or inequitable distribution. Service integration may centralise standards that challenge professional integrity. Where financial imperatives drive integration, benefits may prove illusory or dependent on transitory inspirational leaders. Organisational inertia can pull back the reform of public services, where ways-of-working are locked in organisational memory. Thompson (1997) concludes that whilst integration is a useful concept, in practice clumsy institutions and diversity of structures may be better delivery vehicles. Hence, service integration poses even more serious challenges for the transitional context of Kazakhstan characterised by the lack of public accountability and top-down hierarchy.

Arguments favouring public service integration reference efficiency, effectiveness and fairness. However, as Behn (2001) argues, the accountability dilemma is a trade-off between accountability for finances and fairness and accountability for performance. Collective accountability to the citizenry as a whole accommodates competing objectives since on-demand integrated services rarely eradicates over-capacity, transaction costs and competition. Centralised hierarchy, for example in UK public services, seems now to be migrating to networking organisational forms (Bate, 2000), typified as Bardach (1998) suggests by organisational forms differently combining price, authority and trust.

The literature suggests that service integration is particularly challenging for post-communist hierarchical centralised bureaucracies due to the lack of relational trust between government institutions. Having trained and practiced separately, public service integration brings professionals together, perhaps for the first time, often with a heritage of distrust (Glen and Reeves, 2003). As integration formalises joint decision taking, professionals are challenged to renegotiate roles, identities and norms patterned over time in vertical structures. Integrating functions necessitates integrating competences re-energising of demoralised staff (Abbott et. al., 2005). Sennett (2000) emphasises the importance of allowing time for discourse and identity renegotiations in service environment. Thus, it is important to explore the change of identities perceived by the government officials, while introducing customer-oriented working practices.

Where one group of professionals dominates new arrangements, this may create inter-professional resentment. Further, codifying professional judgements in simple tick-box assessments can dehumanise professionals who respond by abrogating responsibility and in extreme cases suffer organisational violence (Adams and Bray, 1992). All integration widens the scope of accountability, broadening professional's knowledge and competence domains. In such domains and interdisciplinary teams, some professionals thrive. Professionals flourishing in integrated services may be those embracing broadened domains of knowledge and practice (Glen, 2003). Such changes blur distinctions between control of the profession and control by the profession, the functions and knowledge constituting a profession. Transformative service integration involves unlearning old ways-of-working, old terminology, old roles and functional mixes. By posing the questions, what is the problem and what is the solution, service integration unfolds a new learning environment for staff and stakeholders.

Several common features have been described in the context of front-line service work, including high turnover, low status, poor pay and few career prospects (Korczynski, 2003b; Russell, 2002; van den Broek, 2003). The human management practices that characterise front-line service work have been described as

routinisation, control, and a strong emphasis on emotion management (Burgess and Connell, 2004). Many studies have drawn critical attention to the customer service organisations as “electronic sweatshops” – a post-industrial, high-tech IT organisational form, which nevertheless reproduces the Taylorist paradigm of task routinisation and de-skilling (Winiecki, 2004; Korczynski, 2003b). While some researchers have examined “high commitment management” in the context of customer service organisations (Houlihan, 2002), others described the forms of resistance to management and its extensive controls (Bain and Taylor, 2000; Sturdy and Fineman, 2001). The work of customer service organisations can be described as fraught with contradictions. They are required by the management to be both cost-efficient and customer-orientated. However, as previous studies of customer service organisations have already pointed out (Korczynski, 2002a; Houlihan, 2002; Bain et al., 2002), these twin objectives are fundamentally contradictory. These contradictions are manifested in daily confrontations with dilemmas concerning cost-efficiency versus quality-of-service and empowerment versus de-skilling.

This research examines how these attributes of customer service work relate to the single-window centres in the Kazakhstani context, and question what of sort of CoPs might develop among the front-line staff in the single-window centres. To answer these questions posed, a case study was conducted in two single-window centres in Astana. Organisational learning is challenging both conceptually and practically, and the difficulties of defining and promoting double loop learning are a recurrent theme. Examining these issues in a context which discourages challenging existing work practices raises important questions about what organisational learning means and how it can be evaluated within a situation where it may only be implemented to a limited extent. The issues raised in the literature reviewed led to the development and refinement of three research questions, on experiences of those involved in the OSS policy design and implementation, the value of “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” as conceptual tools for analysis of service integration, and the nature of service integration in the transitional context. These questions, and the methods that were employed to investigate them, are discussed further in Chapter 4.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND PRACTICE

The previous chapter highlighted the theoretical basis for this thesis, which analyses the implementation of service integration policy in the transitional country such as Kazakhstan. This thesis targeted managers of the OSS and MJ defined by legislation as being responsible for the design, coordination and control of public service integration through single-window arrangements. The front-line personnel was another particular group targeted by this research project as being involved in customer service delivery and, for this reason, able to provide insights on learning new practices and skills as well as perceptions of their new professional identities. In addition, the customers were taken into consideration to explore their views on the quality of service delivered through OSS.

This chapter is concerned with the development of the research aims, selection of data gathering methods and analysis, issues in policy research and some comments related to my two-fold role as a researcher and a former civil servant. The choices made throughout the research process are discussed, the implications considered, and the strengths and weaknesses acknowledged. Researching within the area of public service integration has a number of important research design implications. It is a highly politicised area, especially in the context of the transitional country characterised by the lack of democracy and top-down political system, therefore, ethical implications arise at every stage of the research process. The Social Policy Association Guidelines on Research Ethics (2009) were used, and ethical concerns are discussed throughout in relation to different aspects of the research, as well as in a separate section 4.3.

My professional interests could be a possible source of bias. For example, my sympathetic attitude to the problems expressed by the participants in facing resistance to change might have influenced the research findings. Gummesson (1991: 53) warns that pre-understanding can be blocked or become a pre-disposition to particular findings, meaning the inability to apply sufficient reflexivity to challenge pre-existing judgements and assumptions. However, my pre-understanding of the

context and connections with the Kazakhstani policy-makers were extremely beneficial for this research project, which could hardly be conducted by an outsider, particularly from a Western institution.

There are three main sections to the chapter dealing with research design as an ongoing process, data collection, and data analysis and presentation. The first section considers why a qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate for the research questions, explains the further choices that were made, such as the selection of Kazakhstan as a country, and the context and selection of the single-window centres as case study organisations. The key points from the original research proposal, issues of arranging access to the participants, and the changes that arose following the results of the pilot study and during the main study are discussed. The data collection is then discussed in depth, considering the choice of five qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews (cognitive conversations), participant observation, documentary analysis and virtual ethnography. The final section deals with data analysis and presentation. The starting points and development of the analysis are discussed. There are a number of difficult issues in terms of the presentation of the research findings, particularly transcription, translation, anonymity, confidentiality, and the ways in which these issues were addressed are discussed. The final section summarises the research design process, the choices made, and the limitations and strengths of the methods employed. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to provide a reflexive and transparent account of the research process.

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN: A REFLEXIVE PROCESS

This section sets out the overall context and structure for the research, discussing the initial choices that were made and the changes that occurred following the results of the pilot study and during the process of carrying out the research. The initial design was intended to be sufficiently flexible to allow space for learning and adjusting while undertaking the fieldwork, and to take into account the fast moving policy implementation in which changes could have significant implications for the research

questions. Understanding the changes in the research design is important, for as Silverman (2005: 36) argues, what happens in the field as you attempt to gather data is itself a source of data, rather than just a technical problem. The development of the research questions is discussed first, followed by an overview of the research design.

4.1.1 Research Questions

The review of the literature in the preceding Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted a number of important issues relating to understanding the processes of shaping NPM reforms in transitional countries, the impact of contextual factors, the concepts of organisational learning and “communities of practice”, and the challenges faced by the customer service organisations. Following Blaikie (2000: 83), my research questions provided exploration, description, understanding, explanation and change.

- *Exploration and description.* This research *explored* and *described* service integration processes in Kazakhstan, where the topic of research as well as the context of the country in which the research has taken place were very little known about. This thesis was aimed to identify the key stakeholders in the service integration policy, explore their behaviours, relationships and perceptions, their role in shaping the policy decisions.
- *Explanation.* This research sought to explain specific patterns in policy implementation such as power dimensions, control, performance management and personnel practices. It aimed to explain if and to what extent organisational learning took place within the single-window centres, and what type of “communities of practice” developed among the front-line personnel.
- *Understanding.* While understanding is also aimed at finding out *why* the observed patterns occur, Blaikie (2000: 74-77) distinguishes it from explanation as it is based on the subjective viewpoint and motivations of the social actors involved. This thesis attempted to understand the underlying reasons for the adoption of the country-specific “alternative-access model” of service delivery, the change processes related to the new working practices and transformation of professional identities of the front-line personnel from

different perspectives: those involved in policy design and control (managers of the MJ), those involved in actual implementation of the policy (OSS managers and staff), and those who received the services through single-window arrangements (customers).

- *Change.* This thesis aimed to analyse how implementation of the public service integration policy could be improved on the basis of the experiences learnt so far in the conclusion chapter.

The literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 led to the development of three research questions, which were outlined above in the introductory chapter (see Table 1):

Table 1: Research Questions

Research Questions	
1.	<i>What are the experiences of those involved in the implementation of public service integration through single-window arrangements in Kazakhstan?</i>
2.	<i>In what ways is service integration a problematic concept in a transitional context such as Kazakhstan?</i>
3.	<i>Are concepts such as “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” useful tools in analysing public service integration?</i>

While these questions have been refined during the course of the research, the modifications have been for the purpose of clarification rather than introducing any substantial shifts in direction, and the underlying aims and intentions have remained the same.

The rationale behind each question is now discussed. The intention of question one was to understand the experiences of the OSS managers and front-line employees who were directly involved in the policy implementation: from design and delivery of joined-up services, negotiation with the stakeholders, adoption and adaptation of new service arrangements, and to use these experiences to evaluate the policy framework developed and applied at the national and local levels. The views of the government officials in a coordinating role from the MJ and customers were also

taken into account to analyse policy implementation from different perspectives. The literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted the nature of ongoing service reform changes in transitional countries and the impact of the managerial reforms on public service organisations. The importance of contextual factors in implementing service modernisation has been addressed in a number of research projects, as highlighted in the literature review chapter. There is a debate questioning the applicability of Western managerial ideas in transitional countries characterised by the weak accountability, top-down hierarchy and high corruption. Hence, question two aims to analyse the ways in which service integration is a problematic concept in the transitional context of Kazakhstan. Several studies indicate the importance of contextual factors in interpreting the change processes as the institutional framework and public sector culture play significant roles in shaping the managerial reform agenda. This led onto a consideration of service integration, both in theory and in practice, as addressed in question three. The literature review demonstrated that the concept of service integration has become increasingly prominent in research though its meaning and usefulness remain contested. The literature suggested that successful service integration involves organisational learning, and learning that occurs in “communities of practice” and non-formal settings. Therefore, the purpose of question three was to review applications of the concepts of “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” in relation to the analysis of service integration in a Kazakhstani context. The intention was to gain an understanding of the learning experiences of the managers and front-line staff in implementing the service integration policy and explore the type of “communities of practice” developed within selected case study organisations. The aim was for both a conceptual and practical understanding of the usefulness of the concepts, such as organisational learning and “communities of practice” in relation to service integration within the context of a transitional country such as Kazakhstan, so that selected case study organisations could be assessed.

There are a number of features of the research that suggest a *qualitative* approach is the most appropriate means for addressing the three research questions set out in Table 1. The research aims required detailed, empirical data, best collected through an in-depth exploration of the issues with the selected participants. Only in this way could an understanding of the situation could be defended. As such, the *qualitative*, more than *quantitative* methods seemed more appropriate as they are contextually driven and require a high degree of interpretive work, whereas quantitative methods rely on already established categories of investigation that do not necessarily link to organisational contexts (Langan-Fox and Tan, 1997). Different groups of the participants such as the OSS managers and front-line staff, senior managers of the MJ and service users were selected for detailed investigation of service integration processes based not on statistical representativeness of the study population, but on their potential to help in the exploration of the service change processes and the development of the understanding.

Though the quantitative survey could provide a general picture of trends and relationships, this method did not fit my research questions, as the nature of relationships between the participants changes in the service arrangements and perceptions of professional identities are non-linear and difficult to capture with quantitative measures, which may not be sensitive to issues such as political, cultural and organisational context. For background information I gathered quantitative data in the form of statistics on the number of the services delivered, customers served, investments made.

Most importantly, qualitative research, whilst recognising all the variations contained within that term, allows for an emphasis on context and experience that is vital in understanding the impacts of policy for service providers and service users, and the responses to policy changes. Bryman (2001: 279) also notes that qualitative research tends to emphasise process. This is important in allowing an understanding of the ways in which responses to service integration policy have unfolded over time, since service integration itself is a process. The issues under investigation are not static, and while the research can provide only a snapshot of these processes, it is important

to recognise the fluidity that characterises the research environment. The literature review indicated a number of reasons why context is important: the characteristics of the political system and state capacity (institutional, administrative and technical) are critical factors in shaping the public service reform.

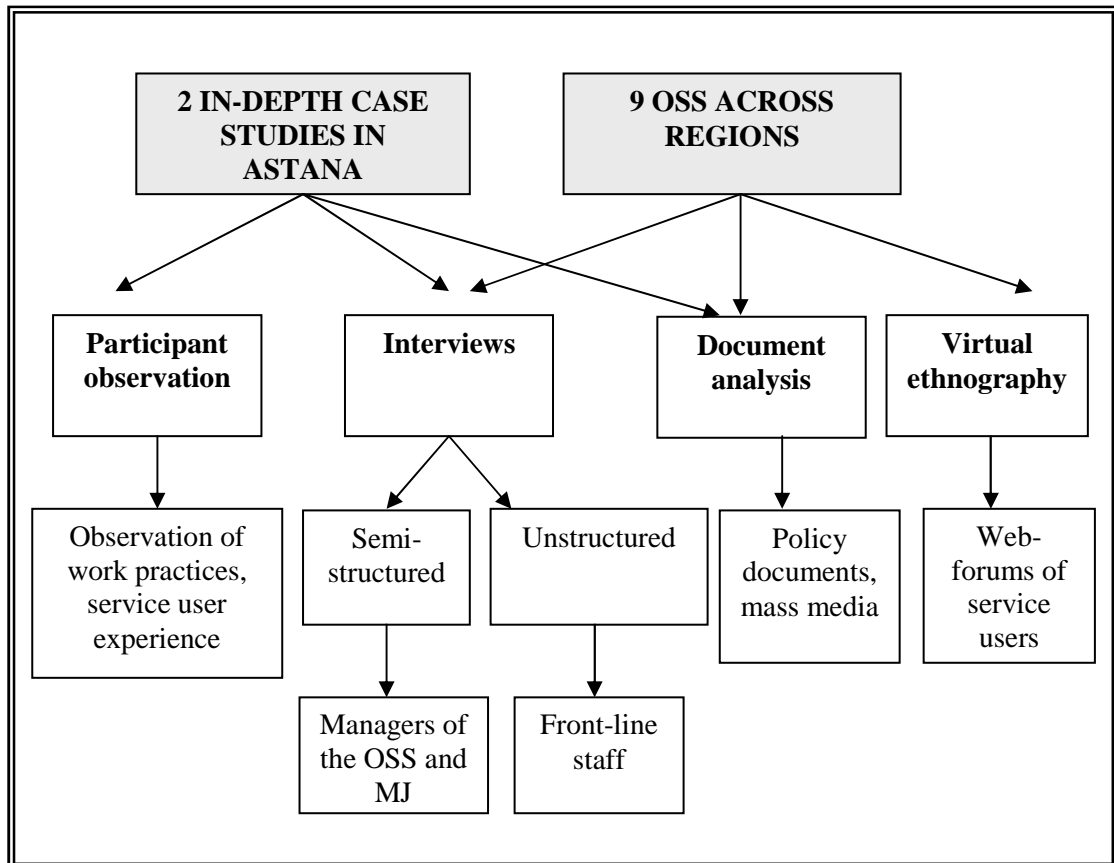
4.1.2 Triangulation

Important choices associated with qualitative methods such as case study, interviews, observations, documentary analysis and virtual ethnography are considered below. In each case the choice is justified by appropriateness to the research questions. Triangulation is an approach to gathering data rather than a method in itself. Harvey and McDonald (1993) suggest that it can involve either one researcher using more than one research technique, or two researchers using the same technique, or two or more researchers using two or more techniques. Bell (1999) sees it as a multi-method approach that involves the study of a phenomenon through cross-checking individual accounts and data from a number of sources. This allows the researcher to produce a balanced account by comparing and contrasting evidence from the data generated. A third definition is given by Rose (1982: 309) who describes triangulation as:

A term used by Denzin (1970) to describe an important methodological principle. It means the use of two or more different methods in studying the same phenomenon – the point is that no one method is infallible, so the use of several methods gives more conclusive results.

However, even if triangulation is used, Rose (1982) warns that the usual constraints of access, time, confidentiality, and so on will still be experienced by sociologists using the approach in their research. An important element of this research is the way the processes and changes have been interpreted by key players, and primary sources of data have been used to obtain a first hand account of different interpretations. Figure 2 illustrates the research design framework, which involved triangulation of the methods.

Figure 2: Research Design Framework



As Figure 2 illustrates, a number of primary sources were used to generate data for this part of the thesis. One was in-depth case studies to examine service integration processes through observation of daily work practices, dynamics of multi-directional interactions between the managers, front-line staff, stakeholders and clients, and learning experiences. Second were semi-structured interviews with the managers of the OSS and MJ who were able to comment on the design of the strategy, selection of service delivery arrangements and technologies, control mechanisms and personnel policies. Third were unstructured interviews with the front-line personnel who shared their experiences on learning new work practices, changing their roles and tasks, perceptions of the professional identities. Another element of this research is more “local” in terms of the exploration of the way in which single-window policy was implemented, and what impact it had on the public service delivery in Kazakhstan. Four types of the data have been used to examine the policy implementation process. Firstly, there are official documents that provided a

legislative framework for service integration policy. Secondly, there are mass media publications, which give indication of the type of issues raised within public debate on the policy. Thirdly, there are existing international and local surveys that relate to the evaluation of the Kazakhstani government in terms of government effectiveness, control of corruption, technological infrastructure, and readiness for e-government as combination of these factors could facilitate or constrain the progress of policy implementation. A final and important component is virtual ethnography, which analyses the citizens' views expressed via the Internet that provide rich data on the customer experiences of the quality of services delivered through single-window arrangements.

Hence, triangulation has been used to apply a “family of methods” to construct a case study enabling an examination of public service integration from the perspectives of service providers, service users and policy coordinators. Primary and secondary sources have been employed in this research and strengthened through triangulation. The details of sampling and the way each method was used in the research are presented below together with their respective rationales, advantages, disadvantages and problems faced during research.

4.1.3 Selection of Case Studies

Case studies offer a number of advantages and disadvantages. Case studies offer the opportunity of developing an in-depth understanding of an issue within a specific context using a multi-method approach. As Yin notes (1994: 13): “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. There are several common critiques of case studies including a lack of rigor, a lack of basis for generalisation, and the suggestion that they are too time consuming to analyse and present (Yin, 1994: 10-11). These concerns are refuted by Yin (1994: 32) who argues that the goal of case studies is to expand and generalise theories and understand policy implications – what he refers to as level two inferences, as opposed to level one inferences from a sample of a population, a point

reiterated by Bechhofer and Paterson (2000). The choice of cases and the methods to be used are clearly crucial in ensuring the strength of the method. The reasons for the selection of Kazakhstan as a case country and case organisations in Astana were noted in the introductory chapter. Anticipated problems with generalisability have been minimised as much as possible. The significance of the OSS policy as a key element of the service modernisation reform has been already demonstrated both for the government and citizens of the country. The main purpose of the single-window centres was stipulated by the Government Resolution No. 1 dated 5 January 2007 as “the provision of public services based on the one stop shop principle to accept applications from clients and deliver processed documents”. Within four years of implementation since the launch of pilot projects in November 2005 over 300 single-window centres were set-up and the number of services was increased from 25 to 57, with a short-term vision to expand up to 100 services across different government departments. Thus, the rationale for using OSS policy as a “case” is robust. Moreover, public service reform spread rapidly and was backed by national legislation. This means that, by and large, the public sector in Kazakhstan has been affected by the NPM ideas and generated similar experiences across regions.

Second, a case study method would help me to answer the research questions – to explain and interpret transformational changes in service integration in the transitional context – that are too complex to capture with the quantitative research strategies. By employing a case study method I relied on multiple sources of evidence: structured and unstructured interviews, policy documents, observation and virtual ethnography, “with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 1994: 13).

The use of the case study in this research is made in different ways and on different, but related, levels. On the one hand, there is the “case” as a “theoretical construct”. In this instance the case of OSS policy is used to examine service integration processes. The case is used to exemplify the theoretical concepts of NPM, service integration, organisational learning and “communities of practice”, and the way different key actors have interpreted these concepts and processes – thus

demonstrating the areas in which there are “contested domains”. As well as the case being made at a theoretical level, the OSS policy is used as an “empirical unit” presenting a case study of service integration to illustrate change processes and transformations within selected single-window centres.

I used a theoretical rather than statistical sampling to select cases. Mason (1996: 93-4) explains that theoretical sampling means selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to research questions, theoretical position of a researcher and the explanation which a researcher is developing. From a practical point of view the case studies needed to meet certain characteristics to develop and test my theory and explanation:

- Area of function - they should represent explicit examples of public service integration;
- Time - they should have had enough time to introduce new service arrangements and technologies, generate organisational learning and renegotiate their roles and professional identities.

Given my intention to understand and explain service integration processes, it seemed reasonable and appropriate to select the single-window centres among other public sector organisations as a new, innovative organisation aiming to deliver high quality, customer-oriented joined-up services. The choice of the single-window centres as case study organisations allowed particular processes of service integration, use of personnel policies, control mechanisms, technologies, nature of relationships between key stakeholders and change of the roles of the front-line staff to be identified and examined through the analysis of a range of data.

The next question was to decide on the type of case design – multiple or single. Given my interest in understanding service integration processes, I wondered if there is a “replication logic” (Bryman, 2001), if similar experiences can be found in different case study organisations. Hammersley and Atkinson acknowledge that “the researcher must make a trade off here between breadth and depth of investigation” (1995: 40). Two case studies were selected for detailed scrutiny to demonstrate in a

rounded way the particular changes in specified contexts rather than examine surface patterns within a larger sample. The reasons for choosing case study organisations in Astana such as OSS-1 and OSS-2 rather than anywhere else were highlighted in the introductory chapter. I was interested in exploring the adaptation of the new service delivery model, as well as examining the learning experiences of the managers and front-line staff, and change in the roles and professional identities of those involved in front-line customer service. For this reason the time variable was critical in my research. Both case organisations were launched on a pilot basis in November 2005, and during the period of data collection for this research project (from December 2006 to December 2008) they had already accumulated more experience in joined-up service delivery compared to other OSS, which were established one-two years later and were not able to provide rich empirical data. By selecting case studies in Astana I had a unique chance to observe change processes from the pilot stage to the actual implementation of the single-window arrangements over a three-year period. Two case studies were a manageable number for me as a single researcher and enabled me to develop explanations through detailed scrutiny of how change processes were implemented in particular contexts. However, as Mason notes we “cannot expect a context to be representative of all contexts of that type” (1996: 97). Table 8 presents background information on the selected case study organisations in Astana.

Table 8: Background Information on Case Study Organisations

	One Stop Shop - 1 (Almaty district area)	One Stop Shop – 2 (Saryarka district area)
Access to the location	Both cases are located in the densely populated areas, have good access by public transport, and are accessible for wheelchairs	
Number of staff	50 employees, including manager, 2 deputy managers, 2 supervisors, 30 front-line personnel, 8 consultants and administrative staff	
Number of clients per day	around 800 clients (in peak times up to 1,000 - 1,200)	
Facilities for clients	Electronic queue, bank, notary office, copying and photography services	
Office conditions	150 square meters re-furnished building hot desking	250 square meters newly built office hot desking

As apparent from Table 8, both case study organisations had a similar number of employees, level of workload in terms of the number of clients to be served, and common features in the physical design of the office. The detailed description of the OSS physical environment is presented below.

The question could be raised that it might have been too early for policy implementation to demonstrate the success or failure of the reform and visible changes within three years of development. However, it seemed unreasonable for me to delay the research to allow more time to pass since the policy launch for a number of reasons. The single-window centres did exist and provide 25 services of different government departments during the period of my fieldwork; the issues that I was interested to explore, such as change processes in service design and delivery, learning new practices, changes of professional identities, did take place so my participants were capable of providing primary data on their experiences, values, roles, and perceptions of new identities.

It could also be argued that the single-window centres from the regions rather than from the capital could have been studied as the latter might have received more resources, staff and control from the policy coordinators. However, in this instance the choice of case studies was intentionally limited to the OSS located in the capital due to the fact that they were the first to pilot single-window arrangements, introduce new technologies and policies, and, for this reason, had accumulated more experience to offer rich, empirical data for my analysis compared to the regional OSS, which were recently established. In order to strengthen external and internal validity of my data I did examine the single-window centres at the regional level to capture general patterns of the change processes. I was interested to know whether similar or different trends in service integration process could be observed across different regions. It was difficult to make a choice out of 200 offices available at the period of data collection. Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981) claim that the size of sample is dictated by the social process under scrutiny. I used two variables to select the cases relevant for my research questions: geographical location and time. Four geographical regions were selected: north – south – east and west to get insights from

different parts of the country with two OSS in each region and one OSS in Almaty city, a former capital and now a business and cultural centre. Using a time variable I selected those single-window centres which were established earlier (at least a year) than others in the same region and had accumulated some experience introducing new service practices. Remembering that the sample size should help a researcher to understand the process rather than to represent statistically a population (Mason, 1996: 97), in total eleven single-window centres were selected including two case organisations in Astana that proved to be enough to provide unique, primary data from different regional contexts for cross-checking and strengthening the validity of my data:

- two in-depth case studies in Astana;
- two in the south region (South-Kazakhstan and Kyzylorda regions),
- two in the north region (Karaganda and Pavlodar regions),
- two in the west region (Western-Kazakhstan and Atyrau regions),
- two in the east region (Eastern-Kazakhstan and Kostanay regions), and
- one in Almaty city.

In other situations I might have used a set of multivariate analysis to select case organisations out of 200 OSS by type of technologies, socio-economic indicators, number of customers, services, personnel, invested resources etc. However, at the time of data collection the OSS at the city and regional levels had standard organisational structures, facilities and a list of services, similar number of staff, therefore, these parameters could not be relevant as variables in this research. In this instance, the choice was based on the relevance of case organisations to my research questions and conceptual framework. As Mason (2002: 136) emphasises, the key issue for qualitative sampling is how to focus, strategically and meaningfully, rather than how to represent.

Hence, the choice of two case study organisations in Astana and nine OSS in the regions as cross-check comparators is robust given their relevance to my research questions and conceptual framework as well as their ability to provide rich, empirical data both for in-depth examination of service integration process and surface

exploration of policy changes across the country. The following section discusses issues of arranging access to different groups of participants: senior managers of the MJ and OSS, front-line employees and stakeholders.

4.1.4 Arranging Access to Participants

Lofland and Lofland (1984: 25) suggest that when negotiating access to a research setting it is necessary to be “armed with connection, accounts, knowledge and courtesy.” As was noted above, given the hierarchical system of the civil service it would have been hardly possible to approach the senior managers of the MJ and OSS for information in the role of a researcher for two reasons. Firstly, the managers of the MJ and OSS are not easily accessible for people who work outside civil service. The government officials of the MJ do not have direct interactions with customers, and work within a closed, hierarchical system and cooperate with colleagues from the stakeholder departments who hold similar management positions. The OSS managers are perceived by the public as important figures in the local context as they coordinate delivery of public services in high demand such as, for example, starting-up a business, property registration. The managers of the MJ, OSS, stakeholder departments and local municipalities constitute professional network based on mutual obligation, personal relations and exchange of benefits. Secondly, there is a lack of cooperation between researchers and practitioners on policy evaluation projects. The Kazakhstani government officials perceive research as an inspection, quality control, and are concerned to see positive research findings rather than a realistic picture. For these reasons a researcher, particularly from a Western university, would hardly be able to get access to the participants without getting prior official permission from a higher authority.

As was highlighted earlier, my position as a former civil servant proved to be extremely beneficial to get access to the participants through both formal and informal recommendations from my employers. Throughout the research project I always reminded myself that I was a researcher and the findings of my research should not be influenced by my previous work experience within the government. I

was financially independent from my employer as I took unpaid study leave for four years as well as from the OSS coordinating body.

In autumn 2006 I was invited by the Agency to participate as a translator in the training course organised by the Dutch Institute for Public Administration on the experience of the Dutch single-window centres for a delegation of the Kazakhstani civil servants. The representatives from the MJ, stakeholder departments and pilot OSS were included among the list of delegates. At that stage I was developing my research proposal and had concerns about the issue of access to the participants. This trip provided me a unique chance to find “gate-keepers” to the participants, build trust through socialising in informal settings, and identify challenges related to research design issues in terms of data access, ethics, and choice of methods. During that training workshop which took place in December 2006 I met the manager of OSS-1, three representatives of the Tax Committee who piloted tax services jointly with the OSS, and four managers from the MJ who were responsible for the coordination of the single-window policy. I presented myself for the delegates as a doctoral student from the University of Edinburgh who was doing research on public service reform in Kazakhstan. They were informed that I would approach them on an individual basis to ask their views on the OSS policy implementation, all information would be kept confidential, and they had a right to refuse being interviewed. In order to secure a positive reaction from the potential participants, I intentionally emphasised that my research was funded with support from the Presidential scholarship and, besides producing a doctoral thesis the government of Kazakhstan expects me to produce a policy paper with recommendations to improve the policy implementation.

The OSS manager, Mr. Aybek Alipbay, immediately became interested in the topic of my research, and we had a number of informal chats when Alipbay explained various aspects and problematic issues related to the OSS policy implementation. Alipbay, 37 years old, was originally from the south region, Zhambyl oblast (the same oblast where the Minister of Justice and most senior managers came from, as it turned out later), where he worked at the local department of justice. He seemed to

be enthusiastic about his new role as a manager of the single-window centre and had excellent communication skills. Alipbay suggested that I would be introduced to Mr. Nurlan Baimurzayev, the Head of the Department for Public Service Quality Control within the MJ, who was responsible for the design of the strategy and performance monitoring of the OSS in the regions. Baimurzayev played an important role in my research as a “gate-keeper” and participant. Baimurzayev had been working in the MJ for the last seven years starting from the Committee for Registry Service under the MJ where he was responsible for property registration. Prior to his job in the civil service Baimurzayev worked in the business company at the managerial position. Given the fact that he came to the public sector from the business sector, his way of thinking and working style contrasted to those practiced by other managers. Baimurzayev was open to new ideas for service improvement and innovation, had a strong character and determination to overcome challenges, and he was explicitly critical towards patronage and the corrupt system flourishing in the public sector. He could be considered a symbolic figure in the Kazakhstani public sector – a representative of a new generation of the government officials who were highly motivated for public service improvement and fighting corruption. Given his experience both in the public and business sectors as well as strong personal characteristics, Baimurzayev was appointed as the Head of the Department for Public Service Quality Control, a new department established specifically for OSS policy coordination. Baimurzayev agreed to be interviewed and promised to help in providing access to the OSS managers, which he actually did. As he noted:

Ministry of Justice should not work alone in separation from others; we need to cooperate with experts, researchers, NGOs and mass media as one stop shop is not for us, but for our citizens, and we can improve service if we join our efforts. Go and speak with directors of OSS, and if you have problems, just let me know.

The Department for Public Service Quality Control consisted of ten employees, including the director who was accountable to six political managers: the Minister of Justice and two Vice-Ministers, as well as the Chairman and two Deputy Chairmen of the Committee for Registry Service under the MJ. Upon return back to Astana Alipbay helped me to get access to one of his colleagues - Mrs. Zhanar Aubakirova, the manager of the OSS-2 in Astana. Aubakirova, a 35-38 year old, active, bright,

business-like woman, was characterised by the managers of the MJ and her staff as a professional manager. Alipbay and Aubakirova were in good collegial relationships, at the same time competing between each other in terms of showing better performance in their offices. Aubakirova had also worked in the local department of justice prior to her appointment as the manager of the single-window centre. As highlighted in Chapter 7 in more detail, the recruitment strategy for managerial posts at the OSS was based on the internal promotion of the managers of justice departments by recommendations from the senior management of the MJ.

During the period of my fieldwork two of my former colleagues got appointments at the MJ: Mr. Marat Beketayev, my colleague from the Eurasian Civil Service Training Centre, was appointed as a Vice-Minister of Justice, and Mr. Altay Kulginov, former deputy head of the regional branch of the Agency, got the position of a deputy head of Legislative Acts Department. Kulginov did a Master's degree in Law at the University of Aberdeen prior to his appointment at the MJ. During the academic year of 2006-2007 we were in regular communication about the progress of our studies and, for this reason, Kulginov was well aware of my research interests and passed this information to Beketayev. The Vice-Minister of Justice invited me for a meeting and introduced me to the management team of the Ministry as his friend who was doing research on the single-window policy implementation, asking them to provide support in data collection. This informal introduction with the senior managers proved to be extremely helpful in getting access to the participants, developing trustful relationships and taking interviews with the managers.

My initial plan was that I would not go further than as a researcher. However, during the period of fieldwork I was invited to two official seminars participating with the OSS managers and asked to give presentations. As trust and relationships had gradually developed over a three-year period between the participants and myself, I felt obliged to share requested information about the international experience of the OSS. In October 2007 I attended the first seminar for 30 OSS managers organised by the MJ which helped me to establish informal contacts with participants before conducting interviews. Initially, the managers seemed to be concerned about the

research findings and consequences for their career development in case of discovering poor performance of their organisations. At that stage of policy implementation the image of the single-window centres was distorted and criticised by the politicians, journalists, businesses and civil society. I explained that my research was not aimed at policy evaluation but rather it intended to explore and understand public service changes using the views and experiences of those who were involved in policy implementation. Chapter 8 provides a detailed description of the relationships between the management of the MJ and OSS during these seminars.

In my initial research design I planned to conduct participant observation of the daily work practices at the case study organisations. However, I was concerned about the issue of access to the work environment and expected that the OSS managers would be reluctant to give their agreement to my presence within the customer service environment. This issue was not raised in our discussions between myself and participants until Alipbay suggested himself to giving me an opportunity to observe the daily routine work by sitting next to his front-line staff for a week or two. As he emphasised:

You will know much more by looking at how people actually work in practice than if you listen to our stories without seeing it: how staff provide a service, how customers behave, what database we use, etc.

Aubakirova also agreed that I would be present at the OSS-2 for a period of two weeks. Both managers and myself agreed that if I were going to provide a report to the MJ about my research findings, I would first submit the draft report for their comments. It might be that my position as a former civil servant facilitated establishing trustful relations with the participants, as people are often merely concerned with what kind of person the researcher is than with the research itself (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 78). I spent two weeks in each case study organisation and had been in regular contact with the managers of the MJ and case organisations throughout the research project which enabled trust relationships to develop between the participants and myself. While reflecting on the progress of the OSS policy implementation, there were several occasions when some participants

raised politically sensitive issues such as corruption, nepotism and relations-based system on their own initiative. This usually happened in the informal settings when the participants could relax and share their views on the problematic aspects of public service delivery without concern to be recorded at the work setting.

Ethical concerns could be raised regarding the extent of voluntary participation of the OSS managers after introduction of myself by the political management and getting official letter from the Vice-Minister of Justice in support of my research (see Appendix 1). However, in the highly centralised environment of the MJ it was important for me to gain political support, otherwise I would not be able to get access to the case study organisations and participants. Though Israel and Hay (2006: 63) note that “researchers have to ensure they negotiate consent from all relevant people, for all relevant matters and, possibly, at all relevant times”, it was difficult to assess whether participants did or did not have freedom of action. I always made clear statements both to the OSS managers and front-line staff that participation in this research was voluntary and they were free to refuse to be interviewed. As described earlier I managed to select case study organisations in Astana whose managers were willing to participate in the research project. I asked for informed consent from all managers whom I interviewed. I was introduced to the front-line staff by the managers as a researcher, however, I was not able to offer informed consent for all employees and service users because observation of customer service and informal talks were taken in the public setting. The following section presents a discussion of the pilot study: the process of piloting research tools, challenges faced, key findings and its impact on the changes in the original research project.

4.1.5 Findings of the Pilot Study

From December 2006 to January 2007 I conducted a pilot study as pre-testing or “trying out” of a particular research instrument (Baker, 1994: 182-3). My pilot study was based both on quantitative and qualitative methods involving questionnaire surveys of the front-line staff in case study organisations, semi-structured interviews with the OSS managers, and unstructured interviews with the senior managers of the

MJ. Although some authors suggest that in qualitative approaches separate pilot studies are not necessary (for example, Holloway, 1997: 121), following my own experience I argue that a pilot study for qualitative research is necessary and important to identify appropriateness of the use of research methods and potential constraints in doing the main study. One of the advantages of conducting a pilot study is that it might give advance warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated (Teijlingen van et al., 2001). In my research project the pilot study helped me to identify problems and constraints related to the use of questionnaire survey and reduce time and resources if questionnaires were disseminated across regions among large sample of respondents in the main study resulting in poor response rates.

Given the fact that public service integration in Kazakhstan was a new area, the main reasons to conduct pilot study were to collect background data on the research topic, establish initial contacts with the participants who may be useful in following “snowball” sampling in the main study, test adequacy of research instruments, and develop research questions and a research plan. Also the pilot study provided me with an opportunity to train research skills in practice which proved to be helpful, as Holloway (1997: 121) emphasised, for the researcher who was a novice, particularly when using the interview technique.

Following Peat et al. (2002: 123) to improve the internal validity of the questionnaire I administered the pilot questionnaire to the respondents in exactly the same way as I planned to administer it in the main study, discarded unnecessary, difficult or ambiguous questions, and asked respondents for feedback to identify difficult questions. I distributed the questionnaire with permission of the MJ through the OSS managers and gave a brief presentation for staff in both case organisations on the aims of my research, methods, and ethical issues. Despite the fact that respondents were guaranteed anonymity and not required to mention their names and positions in the questionnaire, I faced serious concerns about the appropriateness of the use of this method in the main study.

It turned out that it was hardly possible to avoid the OSS managers and supervisors in administering the questionnaire survey. Every step in conducting the questionnaire survey had to be implemented under the surveillance of the managerial staff: distribution and collection of questionnaires, reminding respondents to fill-in questionnaires. Given the shortage of time available during working day to fill-in questionnaires or the lack of interest or maybe a combination of both factors, the respondents tended to copy responses of their colleagues resulting in identical answers in many questionnaires. The participants might be concerned to express their views in the written form as they could be easily identified by their writing style. However, the participants were much more eager to talk about their experiences orally rather than to express their views in the written form: the questionnaire, being a paper document, which could have been misused, was perceived with mistrust. Many respondents faced difficulties in providing answers for open questions given inadequate levels of literacy and a lack of writing skills, despite the fact that most of the staff were university graduates. Overall, the pilot questionnaire survey resulted in poor response rates. The questionnaire survey was not able to capture complex issues of service delivery changes, nature of interactions between the managers, staff, users and stakeholders, and their learning experiences. By contrast to the questionnaire survey, unstructured interviews with the managers of the MJ, OSS and stakeholder departments proved to be effective research tools in exploring their views on the policy strategy and establishing contacts with the participants who were included in the main study.

Pilot interviews helped to identify a number of benefits and barriers of public service integration from the views of those who were involved in policy implementation, and provided a useful starting point for the main study. Responses to the pilot question “What are the benefits of the OSS policy?” can be clustered around three fundamental benefits:

1. *time and cost saving* - customers could apply for several public services at one visit to the OSS which significantly saved time and cost expenditures, especially for people from remote regions.

2. *reducing corruption* - the OSS policy was expected to reduce level of corruption by eliminating direct contact between government officials and clients, thus, decreasing opportunities for bribe-seeking behaviour.

3. *improving performance of the government* - the OSS policy had the potential to facilitate more transparency, public accountability and reduce bureaucracy through introducing integrated databases and encouraging working across different levels and professions.

Five types of barriers were identified during the pilot: political, organisational, economic, technical and cultural (Janenova, 2008a). In regard to the political barriers the respondents highlighted ambiguity in the policy implementation when the government bodies could decide to participate in the single-window project on a voluntary basis. Openness to public scrutiny was defined as another political constraint as service integration facilitated sharing information among stakeholders and making services more transparent and accessible for users. These factors raised concerns among some political managers who were not interested in losing access to illegal payments for public service provision. Organisational barriers included traditional hierarchical structures and top-down management whereas service integration appealed for “flatter” Organisations, encouraged critical thinking among personnel about working practices for better quality improvement. Economic barriers related to the shortage in the number of OSS, personnel, resources, inadequate salary level of the front-line staff. In terms of technical barriers the participants highlighted incompatibility of databases of different government bodies, low level of computer literacy among the population and a lack of Internet access. Cultural barriers were acknowledged to be the most challenging in the views of the participants given the corrupt nature of the public sector; lack of trust among stakeholders as well as between service providers and customers; resistance from the government officials to change their roles and ways of working.

While service integration offered great promise for improving service quality and government performance, the new policy posed a challenge to the status quo and put a strain on existing social contracts on “who gets what”. The pilot study found out

that some government officials met the new policy with skepticism, frustration or even active opposition; while others reacted with passive acceptance. It should be highlighted that some civil servants were quite enthusiastic about introducing new managerial reforms and innovations.

In my research project the pilot study was time-consuming and raised unanticipated problems, however, as Mason and Zuercher note (1995), it is better to deal with them before investing a great deal of time, money, and effort in the full study. Hence, my pilot study provided a useful starting point to test the appropriateness of the research tools and develop research questions to explore service integration in the specific contexts. Following the pilot study experience, I decided to select case studies, interviews, observations and documentary analysis as my research tools, discarding questionnaire surveys as they proved to be ineffective in capturing complex issues of service integration, nature of interactions between stakeholders, learning as well as due to the reluctance of the respondents to express their views in written form.

My observations at the case organisations, which are presented below provide a visual description of the front-line service from the customer's perspective. As highlighted in the introductory chapter, the single-window centres have become part of the daily lives of the Kazakhstani citizens. Every citizen uses the services of the OSS, at least, four times in their life: to receive birth, marriage and death certificates, and for a passport.

I visited OSS-1 in Astana in the role of a service user at three different stages of the policy implementation since the establishment of this single-window centre: a) in August 2006 after 9 months since the policy launch; b) in July 2007 after 18 months; and c) in December 2009 after 4 years. These visits to the single-window centre provided me with a rich source of data for analysis on how the policy has developed, what improvements and mistakes have been made, and how relationships between the government officials and citizens have transformed over time, all these processes were observed both from the customer and researcher's perspective. Neither the front-line staff nor the manager knew me personally when I visited OSS-1 in August

2006. By the time of my second visit, July 2007, I had already known the manager, but was not still familiar with anyone among the staff. I knew that the manager, who had an office in the back of the building, was unable to see clients and my visit did not attract anyone's attention. During the third visit, in December 2009, the previous management and staff of the OSS were replaced by the new employees who did not know me. Thus, I managed to organise three visits to the same single-window centre as a customer without being recognised by the managers and staff, which otherwise could have reduced validity of data because of the subjective attitudes towards me as a client from the service providers.

The OSS-1 is located in the densely populated district with easy access by the public transport and limited parking space. The office building is visible from a far distance because of its bright blue colour among surrounding grey apartment buildings. The colour blue symbolising “freedom” for Kazakhs (a colour of sky), with yellow stripes symbolising “prosperity” (associated with “wheat”, “welfare”) is the corporate colour of the single-window centres following the example of the Kazakhstani official flag. As was mentioned in the introductory chapter, the workplace is split into five sections: waiting area for clients, front-line service area, back-office section (where chancellery and IT services are located), management office and open space for support services (banking, photo, notary and copying services). The opening times of the single-window centre (from 9 a.m. till 8 p.m., Monday to Saturday, without a lunch break) are more convenient than the working hours of the government departments (normally from 9 a.m. till 6 p.m., Monday to Friday, with a two-hour lunch time). In fact, the civil servants at the government departments also continue to work until very late (around 8 p.m.) exceeding official working hours, however, they do not interact with customers during this period of time. Some government bodies accept applications only on particular days (for example, three times a week) and during a limited period of time (for example, from morning until lunch time) in order to allocate time in the rest of the day for review and decision-making process.

The manager of the single-window centre has three deputy managers who are responsible for different functions: managing customer service, cooperation with stakeholders, and the use of technologies. There are two front-line jobs: “consultant” and “operator”. Consultants provide advice on the requirements for a variety of services and help clients to fill-in application templates. Operators check the correctness of the application and accept or reject the application for further processing. The work of the front-line staff is coordinated by the customer service supervisor. Unlike managers and deputy managers who have their offices separated from the customer service area, the supervisor is constantly visible both for the clients and staff. The supervisor deals with conflict situations between service users and staff, and controls personnel discipline. The staff work on a six-hour shift including 1 supervisor, 4 consultants and 15 operators. Administrative employees in the back-office are responsible for the delivery of processed documents to the clients, coordinating postal transportation of documents between the OSS and stakeholder departments, as well as IT support to ensure the smooth operation of computer databases.

The physical environment of the typical single-window centre presents positive differences compared to those available at the government departments until the recent time. Open bright layout of the design, new furniture, large TV-screen, access for wheelchairs have been introduced to create a business-like atmosphere of customer service in the public sector organisation. At the entrance of the single-window centre there is an electronic dispenser, which issues a ticket with a client’s position in the queue. The electronic dispenser suggests several options for customers: application for services; applications by the veterans of the World War II and Afghan War; and banking services. The last option is available for those who want to pay service fees, housing utilities etc. Electronic queue facilitates discipline among clients as they know their exact position in the queue and waiting time until they approach the front-line operator. Banking, photo, copying and notary services are available within the same building of the OSS, which enable customers to save time compared to their previous experiences of the public sector organisations. Comparative description of the service user’s experience at the traditional

government departments using the examples of passport authorities and traffic police are presented below in this chapter. Large information boards provide contact information about the management staff of the OSS (names, phone numbers, e-mails, and drop-in time for customers), service standards, legislation, and application templates. This type of information was not easily accessible in the earlier practice of the public organisations. All members of the staff wear a badge containing their names and positions to ensure that the customer can remember the name and send a complaint in case of any unethical behaviour of the employee. Overall, the single-window centre sought to create an outward-looking and user-focused environment. The organisation of the work process in the single-window centre is illustrated in Figure 3 to structure my analysis.

Figure 3: Organisation of the Work Process in the OSS

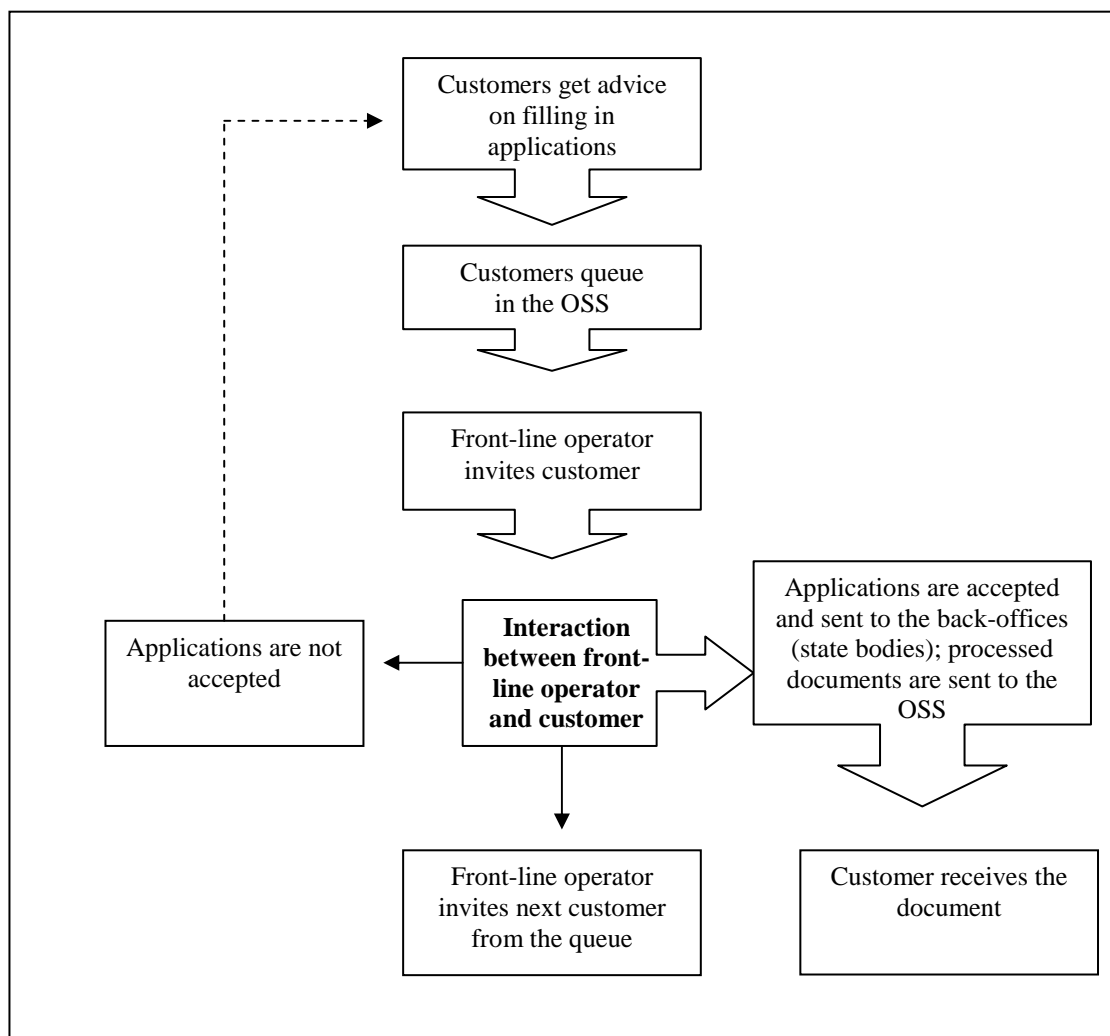


Figure 3 illustrates that customer service at the single-window centre contains several stages: initial consultation - collecting documents - filling-in application and submission - receiving processed documents (in case of correct submission of application) or rejection (in case of incorrect submission of application). As Figure 3 shows, since the front-line personnel do not make decisions on applications, then, the emphasis is only on quick and correct acceptance of the documents. The main functions of the front-line personnel include consultation and acceptance of applications, thus, the knowledge and skills required to handle the customer service interactions are contextually bound.

During the first visit to the single-window centre I needed to change my residence address. My visit coincided with the recent adoption of the new rules aimed at the provision of land for citizens for individual housing construction. The Kazakhstani population who actively migrated from poor rural to fast developing urban areas faced a critical housing shortage. The situation was particularly dramatic in the capital where the number of officially registered inhabitants had increased three times within the last 10 years (from 300 thousand to around one million people). According to the new legislation potential applicants for a free piece of land were obliged to provide copies of their national insurance number and documents certifying a lack of land and private housing ownership. These documents were issued through the OSS by the local Property Centres which were accountable to the local departments of justice. It is important to provide a brief background on the economic situation with the property market in the country in order to understand the massive reaction of the Kazakhstani citizens to the new policy. During 2002-2006, the property market experienced a sharp boom in price where property became the most profitable business investment. The cost of property in 2006 in Astana and Almaty cities reached the European level varying from 1000 GBP per one square metre, and cost of land varied from 3000 - 4000 GBP per 0.10 hectare. The average monthly salary of the public sector employees (doctors, teachers, policemen) was 100-150 GBP at that time. Unsurprisingly, the government's proposal on the distribution of free land was accepted by the Kazakhstani families, with great enthusiasm and new hopes for better life especially among those with many children.

The clients stayed in the queues of the OSS from the early morning, 5 a.m. until late evening in order to submit an application. The building of the OSS-1 with limited capacity of 150 square metres was unable to occupy all customers whose number sharply increased from 1000 up to 4000 on a daily basis. The high level of demand for service increased the number of corrupt practices among OSS employees, some of whom were accused of selling electronic queue tickets to the clients to accelerate the speed of service, thus transferring technology originally aimed at promoting equal access and social inclusion into a tool of corruption.

The consultants were supposed to give advice on filling in applications but because of chaos and disorder they could not fulfil their functions properly. The small group of front-line employees were physically unable to provide customer service to the huge number of clients. Despite modern office conditions, the customer service environment was inhuman both in physical and moral terms. The OSS office was crowded with people, some with children, some were elderly people, for whom getting a free piece of land might be the only chance to own their property, who were staying for several hours in the queue. People looked tired and angry about the poor performance of the government. Both managers of the case study organisations acknowledged that there were registered cases of anti-social behaviour among customers who broke windows and doors in order to enter the building, and had conflicts with the front-line personnel. The managers were concerned both for the safety of their staff and customers. They asked the MJ for support in the form of recruiting security guards, however, given the lack of funding such assistance was not provided. Customers who intended to apply for other services, which were not related to the land ownership documents complained about the government and OSS, as they could not get services in these conditions. It was dangerous for anyone to be present there, for this reason I decided to return to the OSS next time.

To solve the problematic situation and reduce social tension, the Property Centre opened five additional service counters to enable clients to apply for a service directly at the centre in order to share the workload with OSS. However, many customers still preferred staying in the queues of the OSS rather than going to the

Property Centre. As the manager explained, the OSS had an electronic queue and customers knew that if they got the ticket, they would be definitely be able to submit an application whilst the Property Centre did not guarantee service provision even if a client had stayed for a whole day in the queue. The Property Centre had a negative reputation with regular public scandals related to official allegations of their managers and staff in corruption. After several months of negotiations between the MJ and local municipalities, which required these documents, the akimats had finally agreed to cancel this requirement. Rather, the local municipalities would request information on client's ownership of the land and private housing directly from the Property Centre. As a consequence, the number of customers reduced, and OSS across the country were able to return to the normal working rhythm.

In a couple of months the government abolished that resolution as there was no spare land to distribute among citizens for individual housing construction. Hopes of thousands of customers to get a free piece of land and build their own house were broken and contributed to the general negative perception of the government among the public as an indifferent, bureaucratic machine, which served the interests of the officials and their relatives rather than ordinary citizens. This situation left highly negative impact on the image of the OSS and caused wide criticism from clients, journalists, stakeholders and central government.

My experience as a service user during my second visit to the OSS presents a contrasting picture compared to the first visit. By July 2007 the OSS-1 had already existed for one and a half years and accumulated more experience in managing customer service compared to the earlier practice. Customers seemed comfortable with using the electronic queue dispenser as they might have used it before at the OSS and local banks where similar technologies were introduced. A Grievance Record Book was available for customers to make comments and suggestions. The consultants - young females and males of 23-28 years old - were sitting at the table in the customers' waiting hall and provided consultation to the clients. In response to my inquiry about requirements for property registration service, one of the consultants handed me a small piece of paper with information on required

documents, service fees and waiting time, as well as explaining this information orally. The consultants had a large pile of papers with information in the Kazakh and Russian languages on different services. If a client faced difficulty in filling in an application, he/she could use a sample application. Four consultants worked in each shift, and if someone did not know the answer to the customer's question, they asked a more experienced colleague for help. Consultation allowed the saving of time both for the customers and operators who accepted applications. The important observation is that information on requirements for application submission and service fees was accessible by the public both at the OSS (in written and oral form, in Kazakh and Russian languages) and on the web-site of the MJ, which was a significant step forward from the traditional practice. In the traditional practice a lack of access to the information on public services enabled government officials to seek bribes and manipulate citizens. Although information on service requirements, fees and sample forms were available on the information boards, it was evident that customers preferred to receive this information in a face-to-face contact with the consultant. This might happen because Kazakhstani people were not used to having transparent access to public service information and still trusted personal contacts with officials rather than written information. The consultants could provide a more personalised service, which was particularly important for vulnerable groups, for example, migrants from rural areas who might lack literacy, and people who had writing and hearing problems. One of the significant improvements in terms of service access was introducing visits to the disabled clients at home by the OSS staff, which had never happened in the traditional practice. Overall, getting information on service requirements took me about 15 minutes.

There was a telephone inquiry line, which I learnt from city call-centres, however, I failed to get through by phone after several attempts on different days: either the line was constantly busy or nobody took the phone. At the later stage of policy development in October 2008 a pilot call-centre with an easy-to-remember telephone number, "58-00-58" was introduced to provide information on the service requirements and procedures as well as accept complaints from customers about unethical behaviour among the front-line staff and managers. In July 2009, when I

called the OSS call-centre with an inquiry about the service for property registration, I was provided with information on the required documents, service fees and waiting time which helped me to avoid a physical visit to the OSS to get this information and save time.

After I collected the necessary documents I visited OSS to submit an application. I took the electronic queue ticket from the dispenser and joined other customers who were waiting for service. Some of them were watching advertisements on the TV, some were reading newspapers or talking. Customers could see on the large electronic screen how many clients had been already served that day and how many were still waiting in the queue. I waited for half an hour until the number of my ticket appeared on the screen together with the number of desk where I should submit the application. The operator looked through my documents and checked their conformity with requirements by looking at the computer screen. The front-line staff used a specially designed computer programme in which by clicking on the selected type of service they could see a list of requirements, speed of service and fees. The operator sent a request online to the database of the Property Centre to know if the house which I was going to register for passed state control registration (as the apartment building was recently built), and within several minutes got a confirmation that the documents could be accepted. In case the construction company had not passed state registration for the apartment building, the operator would receive corresponding information and reject the application until the building was registered in the state database of the Property Centre. The employee asked me to pay a service fee in the bank and return back to the desk without queuing. I took second e-ticket, for the banking service, and spent about 20 minutes in the queue for the bank to pay the service fee. Then I returned to my operator and submitted the documents with a slip of payment. In return I received a confirmation note that my documents were accepted, and I could expect the issuing of a document within 15 working days. This confirmation gave information to the client about the exact date and number of the office where processed documents could be collected. There were about 15 operators who accepted applications for all types of services.

After three weeks had passed I visited OSS to collect the document. This time I did not have to take e-ticket as documents were issued in the separate section of the office which had a different entrance. The employee asked for proof of my ID and written confirmation on submission of documents. After she found my document among a large pile of other clients' documents on property registration, she asked for my signature in the registration book. My document was ready within the stated period of time and correctly processed, although, some customers complained about mistakes in their documents. In response to these complaints the employees explained that it was not their fault as documents were processed in the Property Centre, and clients had to re-submit their application for correct property registration documents. Some clients complained that their documents were not processed in the due time as stated in the service standards. Again, the staff could neither explain the reasons for the delay of the documents nor provide assistance in contacting the Property Centre to make an inquiry. They suggested that customers contact the responsible department themselves. These cases illustrated the lack of effective communication between OSS and traditional departments, as well as attempts by the OSS employees to avoid responsibility for poor service quality.

In December 2009, I visited the OSS-1 for the third time to learn if there had been any visible changes in customer service. One of the improvements was access to the legislative database provided to the service users. However, the use of this service was limited to computer literate people. The queues had become longer compared to my second visit, which may be related to the increased number of services provided through OSS. While in June 2007 the single-window centres provided access to 25 services, two years later they delivered 57 services.

Three visits of the case organisation in different time periods (9 months, 18 months and 4 years since the policy launch) enabled me to observe visible changes in policy development from a customer's perspective. The research findings suggest that certain positive progress had been achieved in terms of improving the physical customer service environment (electronic queue, nice office layout, uniform for employees, banking, notary, copy and photo services combined in one location etc.)

and making information about public services more transparent and accessible for clients compared to the previous practice (service standards became available on paper, online and by telephone, in Kazakh and Russian languages). However, improvements in the front-line service delivery still had limited impact on the overall service quality given the lack of effective communication between the OSS and government bodies and resistance from the traditional bureaucracy which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 and in Chapter 6. The following section presents a discussion of the data collection process, with justification of each method used and highlighting its advantages and limitations.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

This section explains the data collection process, how the choice of participants and methods in relation to each group of participants was made, what the advantages and limitations of the selected research tools were. Assuming that policy is a complex network or process of decision-making, which takes place at different levels and in different departments, inconsistencies in communication and coordination will clearly impact on how decisions that are made. By looking at different groups of participants, senior managers of the MJ, OSS and front-line staff, whose main functions differed from the design of the strategy, coordination and control to customer service provision, I was able to examine this process in action. In addition, this study involved interviews with stakeholders, in particular the Prime-Minister's Chancellery (control function), Tax Committee (stakeholder at the pilot stage), and local municipalities (stakeholders which took over coordination of the policy after the end of the research project since January 2010). Consequently, it was interesting to study how different participants had influenced policy design and strategy. Finally, I examined views of the service users on the quality of public services delivered through single-window arrangements.

Every manager of the single-window centre who was contacted was given an official letter from the MJ, which contained a brief explanation of the research aims, issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and preliminary list of questions. I had extensive

informal communication with the senior managers from the MJ and stakeholder departments during participation in the study visits of Kazakhstani government officials on public service reforms organised in the Netherlands and Scotland during 2006-2008, as well as at the official seminars related to the single-window policy implementation aspects (in September 2007 and June 2008).

The following sections present a discussion of four research tools: interviews, participant observation, documentary analysis and virtual ethnography, in relation to different groups of participants, as well as defining advantages and limitations of each method used.

4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were one of the key research method in this research project, both semi-structured and unstructured (or “cognitive conversations”). Here, the reasons for conducting interviews are explored; subsequently, the rationale behind the selection of interviewees is discussed; and finally, the way in which the interviews were conducted is outlined.

Given that I was exploring an under-researched area and hence was unsure what was important to the people operating within the new system, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method to get information, and at the same time allow flexibility for me in asking new questions during the interview. Interviews allow the researcher to gain an insight into experiences, events, cultures, and processes experienced at an individual level (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Three important areas of exploration in this thesis include the nature and extent to which service integration process has been introduced and developed, the nature and extent to which organisational learning has taken place to design joined-up services, and the ways key players have renegotiated their roles and identities, and interpreted particular principles such as “single-window approach”, quality of public service, learning – with the proposal that many of these areas are contested domains.

In order to ascertain this, it was important to seek the views of those who could comment on, provide support for, or refute, the interpretations made from other data relating to service integration practices and wider managerial and political influences - in this case, the process of reform, the control and accountability mechanisms as well as technologies employed by the government, and the implications for key players. As Kvale (1996: 30) argues:

The purpose of the qualitative research interview treated here is to obtain descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomenon.

For this reason a horizontal sample was chosen for in-depth semi-structured interviews to reflect the views of 11 OSS managers involved in the management and coordination of integrated service delivery, who had accumulated experience and knowledge in the areas being investigated. The use of a vertical sample was used for unstructured interviews with the senior managers of the MJ, stakeholders and front-line staff in selected case organisations, as I felt that it would be relevant to compare the views and perceptions of key players at different levels of government. The choice also reflects varying interests in the public sector over power, budgets, personnel, technologies and functions. Given the nature of research questions, it was important to refer to specific experiences of the case organisations and people who delivered services, which helped to strengthen reliability and validity of findings.

I decided to use semi-structured interviews as these have the advantage of giving parameters for discussion thus limiting “rambling” but they also leave room to explore particular aspects and ideas. The areas of questioning were devised around the central themes but questions were also tailored for each individual to draw out aspects on which the interviewee had expertise, for example, design of policy and negotiation, or learning to use new technologies and deliver services in new ways (see Appendix 2 for topic guide). The aim here was not to gather quantifiable data but to ascertain the interpretations of different key players in the service integration processes.

OSS Managers

Semi-structured interviews with 11 OSS managers were carried out during the period October 2007 – March 2008. The preliminary set of questions was sent by mail and agreed by phone or personal conversation, and questions were reiterated at the start of each interview. Discussion of definitions and meanings of the “service quality” was introduced at an early stage in the interview. Such conceptual questions were challenging for participants, however, it proved to be useful to hear their initial reflections on the concept of “quality” rather than asking these questions later when their definition had been influenced by the interview that had taken place. The managers were asked to pay special attention to the process of development of the OSS policy, particularly the process steps, how they became involved in the policy implementation, how they negotiated with stakeholders, recruited and trained staff, chose technologies, what the constraints were, and how they tried to overcome problems. Particular emphasis was paid to the managers’ reflection on learning processes taking place in their organisations, how they and their staff introduced new service arrangements, how their roles and perception of professional identities changed. Towards the end of the interview the questions were asked for participants’ thoughts about suggestions for how policy implementation could be improved to end on a positive note.

Interviews, each ranging from 40 to 60 minutes, were conducted in the Russian language, digitally audio-recorded. Interviews with managers from case study organisations in Astana were conducted face-to-face, with managers of other OSS in the regions – over the phone. Unfortunately, it was too difficult to conduct face-to-face interviews with the OSS managers located in different regions across the country given shortage of time and resources available for a single-authored research project. The following section explains the reasons for the choice of unstructured or *cognitive* interviews and the ways in which this method was used to collect the data.

4.2.2 Cognitive Conversations

During interviews with the managers from the MJ, stakeholder departments and front-line staff the *cognitive conversation* method was employed with open-ended, broad questions that enabled interviewees to think aloud about their experience in designing and delivering joined-up services, choose their own language, context and framework in a process guided as a conversation to interrogate the focus research questions and often reiterating stories to explore depth (Willis, 2005). Cognitive interviews with the managers from the MJ and stakeholder departments were taken during the period between December 2006 – December 2008, whenever opportunities emerged. The front-line personnel were interviewed during the observation period in case organisations from March to April 2008.

Senior managers of the MJ

This group of participants were asked to explain processes of design and development of the OSS strategy, reflect on the type of challenges they faced while introducing new policy, and expressing their views on the policy progress. In order to get an understanding of the policy implementation process from multiple perspectives, I interviewed five senior managers from different departments: the Department for Public Service Quality Control, IT Department, Department for Organisational Control, Department for Business Registration, Legislative Department.

Front-line employees

I had many informal chats with 25 front-line employees during the observation period. The questions for the participants were related to their personal experiences, learning new knowledge and skills, the nature of their interactions with customers, managers and colleagues, their perceptions of the new roles and identities, challenges experienced in the new work setting. Most staff at both case organisations were young, friendly and keen to share their views and concerns about different aspects of the work.

Stakeholders

Although I did not plan initially to include stakeholders as my participants due to the shortage of time and resources available, it proved to be extremely useful to get the views from this particular group, which helped me to explore underlying power dimensions and reasons for resistance from the government bodies to implement the new policy. As was highlighted above, I had opportunities to establish contacts and build relations with the government officials during training workshops abroad. I conducted cognitive conversations with 15 senior managers from the Presidential Administration, Prime-Minister's Chancellery, Tax Committee, and local municipalities to explore their views on the single-window arrangements and progress of policy implementation. The following section explains the choice of participant observation method which is able to capture multidimensional data on social interactions between key players within the customer service environment.

4.2.3 Participant Observation

As part of the case study strategy, participant observation was conducted in two selected case organisations. Here the purpose of participant observation and the way in which the observations were conducted are discussed.

Observation as a research method has been used in many ways – simple observation, non-participant observation, participant observation, and so on. In some cases, the purpose of the observation and the role of the observer or participant observer may be known to those being observed but in other cases the purpose and presence of a researcher may be unknown or disclosed only to a few key people. Each type of observation has particular advantages and disadvantages ranging from observations of “natural” behaviour to subjectivity and bias on the part of the researcher. However, the common aim of observation studies is that observations are systematic. Consistency is managed by deciding the areas, issues, behaviour to be observed in advance and observations are recorded. Methods are agreed before research commences to reduce bias and make analysis more manageable. Observation does inform the data and analysis of this research.

Observations will allow the generation of multidimensional data on social interaction in specific contexts as it occurs rather than relying on people's retrospective accounts, and their ability to verbalise and reconstruct a version of interactions or settings (Mason, 2002: 85). I used observations because I was interested in examining a range of dimensions of service integration that were performed in the context of a "setting", including daily customer service interactions, relationships amongst staff, managers and stakeholders, conversations and language used, challenges and constraints faced by the staff, which cannot be captured entirely by interviews and documentary analysis. I was also interested in an examination of the physical setting and ways of using technology, as well as the impact of the physical environment and new technologies on the nature of interactions between employees, managers and service users.

There are two types of observations that have been used for analysis in this research:

- observations of interactions among participants during training workshops abroad and official meetings;
- observations of the customer service environment and work practices of the front-line personnel.

As an observer I am able to offer a view and interpretation of the processes discussed from the perspectives of a researcher and service user. For this reason I would prefer to see myself as a witness rather than as a formal observer where observation is used as a main method of generating data. As with systematic observation, bias and subjectivity are a concern. However, I would argue that my contribution as an observer is that of a social actor who interprets the events in a particular way. Such observations are as valid as other witnesses to the service integration, for example, people involved in the policy implementation. My extensive interaction with a range of participants has also given me the advantage of in-depth knowledge and the ability to probe with particular questions.

Observations within case organisations involved the development of trustful relationships between myself and participants, and this raises specific ethical issues. For practical reasons I was not able to gain informed consent from everyone observed (front-line employees, customers, stakeholders), and not all participants were aware that they were being observed. Questions about confidentiality and anonymity were given careful thought as I gained insights and knowledge, which were not shared with everyone, therefore, I had to make difficult moral choices about what I could count as data. As Mason notes, these kinds of decisions are not easy, always contextual, and demand an active moral practice (2002: 101).

I acknowledge that reliance on unstructured interviews is problematic, but qualitative data facilitated the capture of nuances of resistance and accommodation in a way that was not possible with any other research method. As Whipp (1998: 54) notes, “interviews enable individuals to reveal the personal framework of their beliefs and the rationales that inform their actions.” Hence, although it is unwise to draw conclusions applicable to the front-line service industry in the public sector as a whole on the basis of an in-depth study of two case study organisations, the data collected do permit the formulation of tentative new perspectives. The following section provides an explanation of the choice and use of documentary analysis method, and sources of documentary data in this research project.

4.2.4 Documentary Analysis

Documents are useful in research on organisations or governments where policy documents are kept and actions are recorded officially (Rose, 1982). Documents may also contain “witting” and “unwitting” evidence. The former refers to information that the original author wanted to convey and the latter refers to what might be inferred from the tone, language, and so on. The task for the researcher is to ascertain what significance “unwitting” content has in relation to the research (Duffy, 1993). In relation to this research, a range of documents have been utilised to examine public debate, changes and transformations within service integration policy. This includes:

- national legislation, which provides the legislative framework for service integration policy and strategy for further development, as well as by-laws of the MJ which regulate personnel policies and service standards of the single-window centres;
- relevant statistical reports published by the government bodies, international and local research organisations;
- mass media publications.

In this way documents, as defined by Duffy (1993), will be used as both primary and secondary sources of evidence. The witting and unwitting aspects of these documents are also relevant as they contain the content of government policy but also reveal the ideas and ideologies behind the policies. Using Duffy's notion of witting and unwitting evidence, they provide the opportunity to examine both stated intentions of particular governments and to explore and interpret unstated aspects of government (Duffy, 1993). Documents were obtained from a variety of sources including Kazakhstani Law Database, web-sites of the government of RK, MJ, international organisations, foreign and local mass media. The purpose of the analysis of documents, therefore, was two-fold. Firstly, it provided a central source of information. Moreover, it was instrumental when redefining the research questions and formulating an initial set of categories for the data analysis. The following section provides justification of the choice of *virtual ethnography* method, and discussion of benefits and methodological difficulties encountered.

4.2.5 Virtual ethnography

Virtual ethnography is the process of conducting and constructing an ethnography using the virtual, online environment as the site of the research (Hine, 2000). It extends the traditional notions of field and ethnographic study from the observation of co-located, face-to-face interactions, to physically distributed, technologically mediated interactions in virtual networks and virtual communities (Clark et al., 2006). Virtual ethnography was used in this research project to collect data on the service delivery at the single-window centres from users' perspective. Although I did

not initially plan to include the service users as my participants, their views expressed online describing personal stories of interactions with the OSS and their perceptions of the service quality provided me a rich source of data enabling to get insight in the customer service experiences.

As part of my documentary analysis I analysed online mass media publications related to the OSS policy implementation. I found out that the readers left their comments after these publications describing their experiences at the single-window centres. The participants were dispersed and fragmented in time and space (they did not group together within an institutional or geographical location). According to Miller and Slater (2000: 21-22) the immersion in a particular case, the reference to a specific locality and participant observation are still the cornerstones of ethnographic research, even when using the internet as the research environment. I collected my data through independent commercial web-sources *Vremya* (<http://www.time.kz>) and *Zakon* (<http://www.zakon.kz>) which provided opportunity for their readers to leave comments unlike the pro-governmental web-sources such as *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* (<http://www.kazpravda.kz>) and *Kazakhstan Today* (<http://www.kz-today.kz>) that restricted users to leave feedback. The moderators of the web-sources *Vremya* and *Zakon* deleted comments which contained abusive language, whereas the majority of the comments remained unchanged.

Virtual ethnography as a method offered me new possibilities to explore service users' experiences unrestricted by time and location, however, it also presented many limitations. Face-to-face interviews with customers could have provided me an opportunity to collect a larger and richer amount of data, use probing and clarifying questions, and capture emotions of the service users, all of these that the virtual ethnography method was not able to provide. On a practical level, virtual ethnography as a method brought more acute methodological challenges, in terms of the demographic composition and technical restrictions (Taylor, 1998). Only a limited group of the Kazakhstani users had access to the computer and Internet and were able to leave their comments - a factor which made generalising about research findings from Internet users to the general population highly problematic. However,

the sample size was of less concern for me as I was interested in particular experiences of the customers rather than more representative behaviour.

Holmes (1997) suggests, the perceived advantage of virtual reality lies in its ability to simulate the “real” world without any of its limitations, thus, potentially, leaving the individual “free” to create. Virtual ethnography as a method enabled me to explore service users’ views for less cost and time compared to the face-to-face interviews, which was significant in my case of the single-authored project. The use of virtual ethnography lifted the restrictions of geographical boundaries and opened a new research horizon for my project enabling me to strengthen the validity of my research findings from the customer’s perspective.

My reliance on the virtual ethnography as the additional method for this research project highlighted important issues. Internet offered personal anonymity for the participants which enabled them to share critical views regarding performance of the OSS, however, they might have been reluctant to participate in face-to-face interviews or focus groups, and express freely their views of the public service providers. In this respect, online research afforded greater insight into the users’ experiences and offered respondents greater freedom - a factor that may have remained hidden in the face-to-face interviews. Chapter 9 explores customer service experiences on the basis of the data collected through virtual ethnography and documentary analysis. The following section considers the issues of data analysis and presentation, presents the discussions of ethical issues and limitations of methods used.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

There are different views regarding the nature of analysing data: some authors have a more narrow understanding of the process of data analysis and define it either as the handling of data, for example by coding it, or as the interpretation of data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). A second group of authors take an intermediate position: Morse and Field (1996), for example, stress that analysis consists of ‘comprehending’, ‘synthesising’, ‘theorising’ and ‘recontextualising’ data. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) distinguish between data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. In the context of the research this last, broad understanding of data analysis is adopted. This section discusses the process of analysing the data gathered in the course of the research and begins by outlining the underpinning research approach. Then, it outlines how the data was initially organised. The challenges of interpreting the data are addressed by looking at the issues of validity and reliability.

4.3.1 Research Approach

The challenge is to deal with a considerable amount of data which originates from a transitional cultural context such as Kazakhstan, which remains an unexplored area in academic literature. The framework of analysis, therefore, has to be broad enough to allow for exploration. Consequently, the research starts off with a ‘theoretically informed’ framework, which maps out the field of managerial reforms in developed and transitional countries. Using the concepts of service integration and organisational learning, it points to the central issues and dimensions of the analysis. At the same time, however, the analysis aims to explore individual experiences of the front-line personnel of learning, changing their professional identities and roles as opposed to testing a hypothesis. Thus, the analytical framework evolved in the course of the different stages of the research. More generally, this points to the independent relationship between theory and empirical research: “... theory suggests problems, but the answers given to those problems may then contribute to the

development, refinement or confirmation of theory” (Roberts, 1978: 289). Then, the aim of the research was to integrate both understanding and explaining.

4.3.2 Organising the Data

The stage of organising data corresponds to Morse and Field’s (1996) notion of “comprehending”, which they characterise as “making sense of the data”. Miles and Huberman (1994: 11) describe this as the process of “data reduction” “... that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organises the data in such a way that ‘final’ conclusions can be drawn and verified”. Therefore, organising the data prepares the ground for the final part of the analysis, by making it more manageable and accessible. More specifically, it aims to establish a link between the data and the initial conceptualisation of the research topic (Bryman and Burgess, 1994: 5). In practice, organising data means bringing together different segments of the data, which have similar characteristics, by way of a thematic analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 26). Morse and Field (1996: 108) suggest that initial categories should be kept as broad as possible and only when more data is accumulated, categories should become more specific. In this context an interesting issue concerns the relationship between theory, data and categories: to what extent do the categories emerge from the data and to what extent do they reflect the initial theoretical conceptualisation of the research topic? (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 31) This is closely related to the original research question and the underlying research paradigm: if the research aims are testing a theory, the categories will be determined to a large extent by theory; if, however, the research aims at understanding a certain phenomenon, the categories will gradually evolve from the data itself. This research aimed to integrate inductive and deductive approaches and categories were informed by theory and the data itself. The categories helped to reduce the volume and the complexity of the comparative data.

4.3.3 Selection and Presentation of Data

All types of secondary data were integrated and analysed in order to explore, in an inductive and contextual manner, service integration processes, implementation of new practices by those who designed the new policy and coordinated implementation versus interpretation by those who were at the front-line of service provision as well as those that were delivered with joined-up services. Statements that were thought to indicate the respondents' stances were extracted from the interview and online texts and organised in themes on a cross-case basis. In the following stage of analysis, the commonalities of each subject's narrative were interpreted further and compared with patterns observed in the legislative texts and mass media publications studied. Finally, in the contextualisation stage, the patterns that were noted were applied back to the subjects' narratives to reveal how the meaning of service integration, learning and renegotiating professional identities changes from individual to individual. Respondents were grouped, at the beginning of the data analysis process, according to their relation to the particular professional groups (managers of the OSS, MJ, stakeholder departments, front-line staff and service users). However, the process of inductive thematisation showed that similar dimensions were evident within selected OSS. In what follows, I focus on the similar processes found to characterise implementation of service integration policy, organisational learning and development of "communities of practice" within the single-window centres.

4.3.4 Transcription and Translation

It was highlighted above that all interviews and majority of data collected in this project were in Russian and Kazakh. As a result, all interview data had to be transcribed, and data in Russian and Kazakh had to be translated into English for inclusion into this final thesis. Given the large quantity of data collected, only the data relevant to the study was transcribed. Similarly, only those sections of the data quoted directly in the text were translated into English. Given time and resource constraints of the research project, it seemed that full transcription of all interview data and translation would be too time consuming.

Birbili (2000) argues that translation-related decisions have a direct impact on the validity of the research and its report. In this research project I was both the researcher and the translator, and ensured good quality of translation by utilising several factors. My first university degree was teaching English and Kazakh; I did a Master's degree at the University of Durham; I was brought-up in a Russian-language environment both in my family, school and university, and I have had extensive experience in doing translation during my professional work. I know not only three languages, English, Russian and Kazakh, but also the culture and mentality of my participants as I have worked in the public sector for six years.

One of the major difficulties in this research project was gaining conceptual equivalence or comparability of meaning (Temple, 1997; Birbili, 2000). For example, I faced difficulties to translate the term "learning" as its direct lexical equivalence in Russian and Kazakh contains the meaning of formal learning gained at the professional development courses, whereas this term in English covers a much more comprehensive view on learning, such as "learning by doing", "situated learning". The term "communities of practice" was another challenging word to translate as it does not have direct lexical equivalence in Russian and Kazakh and its literal translation does not make any sense for participants. One more example is the expression of "mentality" in relation to public sector employees and government officials, it might not be easy for the English reader to pick-up the full implications the term carries for Kazakhstani participants unless it is accompanied by more "cultural" information on the negative associations and connotations that the term "mentality" has in a Kazakhstani context. Several researchers and linguists suggest on those occasions where two languages do not offer direct lexical equivalence that researcher's efforts should be directed "towards obtaining conceptual equivalence without concern for lexical comparability" (Broadfoot and Osborn, 1993; Temple, 1997: 610). The process of gaining comparability of meanings is greatly facilitated by the researcher or the translator having not only "a proficient understanding of a language" but also, as Frey (1970) puts it, an "intimate" knowledge of the culture.

I intentionally decided to translate selected quotations of my participants, both from interviews and web-forums, in order to enable readers of my thesis to “see for themselves” what participants “look like” (Wolcott, 1994). I faced the challenge of either going for “literal” or “free” translation of the text. Honig (1997: 17) argues that a literal translation could perhaps be seen as doing more justice to what participants have said and “make one’s readers understand the foreign mentality better.” However, other researchers argue that such practice can reduce the readability of the text (for example, Birbili, 2000). In this research project I decided to go for literal translation of quotes digitally recorded during semi-structured interviews or contained in online discussion, and choose more “elegant” free translation of comments expressed in informal talks, keeping in mind the risk of misrepresenting the meaning of the conversational partner (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 273).

During interviews I asked participants not only for their answers but also for their interpretation of the concept’s meaning to deal with translation-related problems. For example, at the beginning of each interview I explored understanding of particular concepts, such as “service integration”, “one stop shop”, “service quality” from the interviewees’ perspectives. Thus, the issue of the translation of words, which exist in one language but not in another, concepts which are not equivalent in different cultures, were given careful and specific decisions. The following section explains the ways in which data were selected and presented in this thesis.

4.3.5 Ethical Issues

This study tackles politically sensitive areas, such as public service delivery characterised by highly corrupt nature, lack of accountability and redistribution of powers between key players, therefore, has to consider serious ethical considerations. The main ethical consideration of this study was with regard consent. The OSS managers were asked to give informed consent, and permission was requested and granted by the senior managers of the MJ and OSS in order to conduct observations of the customer service delivery and interviews with the front-line employees at the

case organisations. However, as highlighted above, for practical reasons I was not able to gain informed consent from everyone observed (personnel and customers), and not all participants were aware that they were being observed as observations and informal talks took place in public settings.

Confidentiality was guaranteed to the front-office staff to ensure safety for their careers. It was hardly possible to provide confidentiality for the OSS managers of the case organisations in Astana as they could be easily recognised by the location of their offices. I managed to provide anonymity for the OSS managers across regions and managers from the stakeholder departments by not mentioning their names with reference to the quotes of their comments. The senior managers of the MJ preferred to see their names and positions stated in the thesis rather than being kept anonymous. The following section considers limitations of the methods used in this research project.

4.3.6 Limitations of Methods Used

This thesis aims to analyse the implementation of public service integration in the Kazakhstani context. To answer this question this study employs a triangulation of qualitative methods combining six research methods: case study, semi-structured interviews, cognitive conversations, observations, documentary analysis and virtual ethnography. This study comprises analysis of:

- 11 semi-structured interviews with the OSS managers;
- cognitive conversations with 5 senior managers from the MJ who were responsible for policy coordination, 25 front-line employees during four week observations, and 15 government officials from stakeholder departments and local municipalities.

Every research project has limitations imposed by choice of method and subject. Public service change is a complex matter particularly in the traditionally hierarchical bureaucracy. This research has complex findings that are a limitation when contrasted with the results of hypothesis testing. Re-integration of empirical data

with existing literature has been more important in this work than simply a critical review of existing literature. Although each of the methods used, case study, semi-structured interviews, cognitive conversations, participant observation, documentary analysis and virtual ethnography, has certain limitations and weaknesses, which were discussed in detail above, triangulation of all six methods enabled a strengthening of internal and external validity of my data and ensured robustness of the empirical findings.

Although the quality of empirical data collected through interviews, observations and virtual ethnography was very rich, this thesis benefited significantly from the documentary analysis of legislation, international and local survey reports as well as mass media publications. Triangulation allowed this research to explore service integration process in the context of the legislation and the public debate that surrounded it. It also provided a sounder structure to this thesis incorporating results. The following Chapters 5-9 present the findings of my research discussing key stages of the policy design and implementation, problems encountered during adaptation of managerial reforms into the transitional context, impact of the new policy on the changes in public service provision as well as impact of the traditional bureaucracy on the extent of policy implementation. In particular, this thesis analyses complex relationships between new, innovative organisation promoting customer-orientation and managerial culture and traditional bureaucracy, as well as transformational changes in the Kazakhstani public sector as a result of the OSS policy implementation.

5. PUBLIC SERVICE INTEGRATION POLICY IN A TRANSITIONAL CONTEXT

This chapter along with the following chapters presents an analysis of the single-window policy implementation in Kazakhstan, a country that was not influenced by the prospects of EU enlargement and, thus, did not experience much of the direct foreign influence in the initiation and implementation of managerial reforms. Like many other post-communist countries, at the time of the inauguration of its administrative reform programs, Kazakhstan proclaimed the central principles of professional and accountable government. The reforms were directed at improving the quality of the public administration processes and service provision; improving professional skills and the efficiency of the state apparatus; and fighting corruption (Nazarbayev, 2005a, 2006b, 2007d). An emerging policy paradigm in Kazakhstan is the moving away from a command and control mode of government towards integrated governance through multiple stakeholders. The rhetoric of the reform agenda has largely been adopted from the EU and the World Bank statements.

As was highlighted in Chapter 2, transitional countries are still more blind to the initial sketchiness of the NPM ideas. This research shows that the Kazakhstani political government has put high expectations on the single-window policy as a panacea from poor quality of public services and corruption.

Before implementing any changes it is important to keep in mind that the question of “why” should come before “how”. Since most developed countries have more or less undergone the discussion of “why”, they are now concentrating on “how”. At the same time transition countries try to concentrate on “how” without sometimes knowing the answers to the question of “why”. Over-attention to perfecting administrative processes could be harmful to democracy and the general development of the country. “Public bureaucracy and democratic polity should be seen as complementary; both are needed in our society... As long as democracy is valued, the big questions of public administration must go beyond the big questions of public management” (Kirlin, 1996: 416-8). That is why policy making and implementation requires both the discussions around “why” and “how”.

This case study represents an example of the implementation gap when the Kazakhstani policy makers assumed that the legislative changes would lead to the implementation of the single-window policy, and were more concerned with “how” to design and deliver joined-up services, “how” to introduce new technologies without undergoing a critical reflection on “why” the policy was initiated, “why” it shifted away from the original vision of a single-access model and “why” it adopted the country-specific alternative-access model of service delivery.

This chapter analyses different stages of the OSS policy implementation: design of the vision, piloting new methods of service delivery and transferring experience of the pilot OSS across the regions. In particular, this chapter starts with an exploration of the underlying power dimensions among key stakeholders by examining the design of the policy and the progress of legislative changes in public service delivery. Then, it moves on to examine how the pilot projects were implemented, what constrained policy implementation and why the original single-access model was replaced with the alternative-access model of service provision. Finally, it summarises the reasons for the limited extent of single-window policy implementation in the Kazakhstani context.

5.2 KEY STAGES OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

This section examines the progress of the OSS policy implementation by analysing how the policy vision was originally designed and changed over time, what were the outcomes of the pilot projects, what was the nature of relationships between the traditional bureaucracy and customer-oriented bureaucracy, and what were the underlying motivations of the political management and administrative civil servants to constrain policy implementation to a full extent.

5.2.1 Design of the Vision

Introduction of single-window arrangements in the Kazakhstani public sector evolved into two key policies: e-government and OSS. As was highlighted in the introduction chapter, the single-window centres aim to be integrated in the e-government system by providing public services both through face-to-face customer service and online. Kazakhstan is facing a much more challenging situation in terms of public service modernisation reform compared to many developed and developing countries on relatively small territories. There is a high disparity of population over a huge territory, with low level of computer literacy, limited access to Internet and low ICT penetration in the country. The government was well-aware of the significance of face-to-face customer service at the current stage of socio-economic development and concentrated efforts on creating modern and technologically advanced single-window centres, while improving ICT environment for the launch of e-government system.

The OSS policy was initiated by the President of RK, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was surrounded by the graduates from Western European and American universities. A young generation of policy-makers has brought from developed democracies new knowledge, skills and enthusiasm about success of managerial reforms in those countries where they have studied. Implementation of the OSS policy needs to be considered in relation to the changes that have taken place simultaneously in Kazakhstan within administrative reform. A range of new ideas driven by the NPM ideology, such as development of performance standards, external audits of government bodies' performance, separation of strategic and operational functions, delegation of more autonomy to the managers, building partnerships between public and business sectors etc. have been initiated by the young and ambitious members of government. The assumption was that, "by paying more attention to clients, public service organisations will learn to deliver better results, and that clients will notice the change and experience increased satisfaction" (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000: 116).

The OSS policy was driven not only by the aims to improve cost-efficiency of administrative regulations and service quality, similar to other countries, but also by the political ambition to reduce the level of corruption. Given widespread corruption in the public sector criticized by the international observers, Nazarbayev announced the aims of the OSS policy with a strong emphasis on combating corruption and, then, service quality improvement in the following way:

All regulations and by-laws, which intentionally or unintentionally create conditions for corrupt activities of officials must be re-reviewed. Business must be separated from civil service. We need to fight with shadow businesses, their owners, shadow banking systems, multiplicity of permission documents, and those who give bribes to avoid the law etc. What can we do for this?

1. It is necessary to create Public Service Centres based on the one stop shop arrangement, where in one place citizens can receive passport, national insurance number, driving license, etc. It can be done this year on a pilot basis in Astana and Almaty. (Nazarbayev, 2005a)

The vision of the OSS as an anti-corruption tool in the public sector was then reflected in the State Anti-Corruption Strategy in Kazakhstan for 2006-2010. At the Plenary Session of the Foreign Investors Board, the President of RK stated that the single-window centres were introduced to reduce personal contact between businesses and controlling authorities, and make the government more transparent (Nazarbayev, 2006c). The draft Concept for OSS Development, which had still not been approved by the end of the fieldwork states that the main requirements for priority list of services delivered at the OSS are:

- social and economic significance of the service (i.e. services aimed at protection of social, economic rights and legal interests of citizens);
- mass demand of the service by customers; and
- corrupt nature of the service.

All of these documents reflect high expectations of the government on the OSS policy as a panacea from public service failures and corruption. Borrowing ideas from the NPM theory, the Kazakhstani OSS policy became a huge public campaign, through which the government intended to demonstrate to the international community, as well as the public its efforts to achieve a “more responsive and transparent bureaucracy”.

The OSS policy implementation process can be roughly divided into four stages (see Figure 4):

1. design of the policy vision and launch of the pilot projects (February 2005 – December 2006);
2. the OSS were assigned legal authorities to deliver 25 services and expanded from 30 to 300 offices, new channels of service access were introduced (January 2007 – December 2008);
3. new stakeholders joined the OSS project with 32 services, new channels of service access were added (since January 2009);
4. change of coordinating authority from the MJ to the local municipalities (since January 2010);
5. combination of face-to-face and online customer service provision, 100 joined-up services through 500 single-window centres.

Figure 4: Stages of OSS Policy Implementation

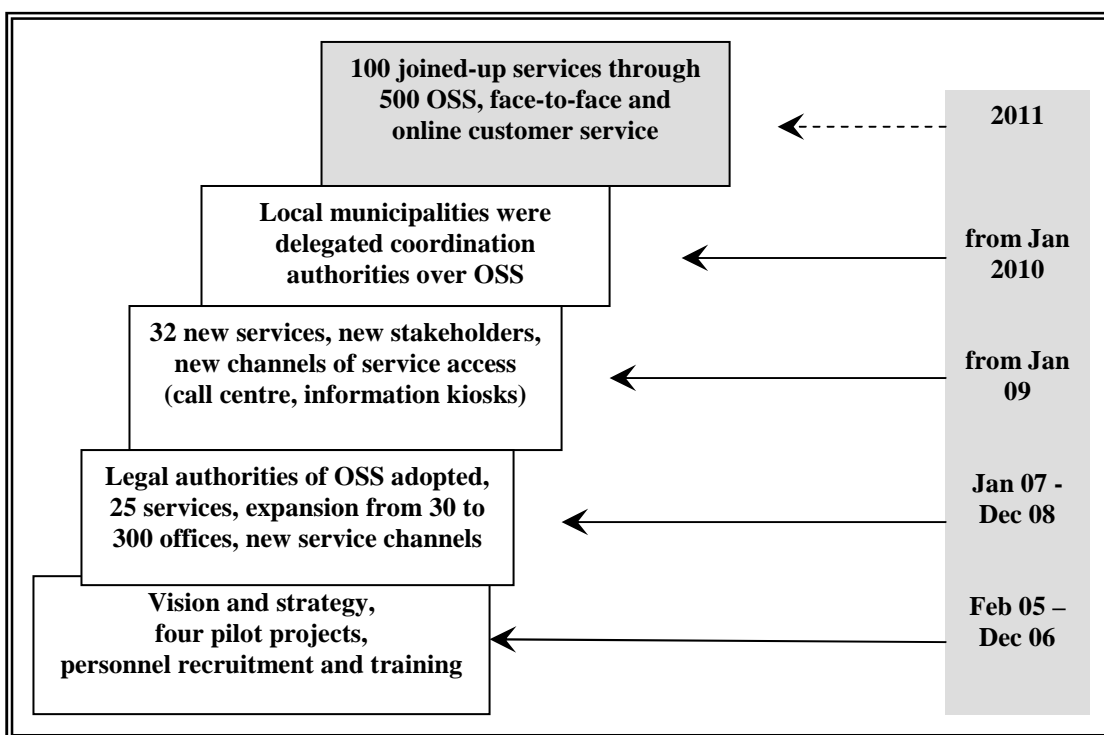


Figure 4 illustrates that public service integration is a “policy-action continuum” with constant negotiation “between those seeking to put policy into effect, and those upon whom action depends” (Barrett and Fudge, 1981: 25), in terms of types of services, methods of service delivery, and re-distribution of power authorities among key actors. Following the policy announcement by the President in March 2005, the inter-governmental working group was created, which involved representatives from the Prime-Minister’s Chancellery of RK and several government bodies. The working group was aimed at developing a vision and strategy for introducing a single-window service provision system which was a new, innovative area for the Kazakhstani public sector at that time. Overall, during the period of policy implementation four different inter-governmental working groups were created to develop recommendations for the improvement of the OSS performance. The second working group created in 2006 provided consultation and recommendations to introduce public service standards and regulations within pilot single-window centres. The third working group was established in autumn 2007 following public accusations from the political party “Nur-Otan” against the MJ for poor management and corruption flourishing in the single-window centres. The political party accused the MJ of developing corrupt schemes to seek illegal payments from the customers for accelerating the speed of property registration service.

The most recent working group called a “Board of Co-Managers” was created in January 2009 on the basis of the OSS-2, which comprised of international consultants, representatives of the “Nur-Otan” party, the National Economic Chamber “Atameken Unity” and the MJ itself. This working group’s aim was to make policy decisions concerning the management of the OSS and public service provision to improve the performance and quality of public services. It was expected that the good practice of this pilot OSS, as a result of effective co-management among international and business consultants, and government officials, would be transferred across the regions at a later stage.

Overall, the work of inter-governmental working groups can be characterized by the short-term nature, lack of continuity, and low motivation of participants. Each working group involved new members which made it impossible to establish long-term and trustful relationships between stakeholders. One of the reasons for constant changes of the members is regular political changes which lead to the massive personnel rotations at the administrative positions. It is a common practice in the Kazakhstani public sector that a newly appointed minister brings “team” members who put pressure on their new subordinates replacing them with their relatives, friends and former colleagues. Such tendencies have a negative impact on the overall effectiveness of the government resulting in a lack of continuity and poor performance as the new staff require a certain period of time to learn their new area of work. Besides, members of the minister’s team are not interested in becoming competent in their fields of work as they serve their political manager and themselves meeting personal interests rather than being concerned with public service quality.

Certain progress has been achieved in terms of making the negotiation process among stakeholders more transparent compared to the earlier practice. The first two working groups did not attract anyone outside the civil service, whereas the latter two commissions involved members from the political party, business and international sectors, although the government was still reluctant to involve representatives of the civil society (for example, non-governmental organisations, opposition parties and mass media).

As the NPM reform was a new ideology for the Kazakhstani government, the government allocated significant funding to organize training of the top-level and mid-level officials abroad with the aim of examining the best international practice of single-window arrangements. During the period from 2005 to 2008 civil servants passed training at the Dutch Institute for Public Administration, Potsdam University, London School of Economics, Yale University, Georgetown University, and National University of Singapore on courses related to public service improvement and modernisation. The local institutions, such as the Public Administration Academy and Eurasian Civil Servants Training Centre, delivered training courses to

the managers of MJ and OSS on performance standards. EU Tacis project “Support to the Development of Performance Standards in the Public Sector of Kazakhstan” provided advisory support in introducing international experience of the performance standards and Charter Mark scheme with particular focus on the UK practice. As Knox observes this process,

the main principles of public service provision (i.e. timeliness, quality, accessibility, politeness and a complaints procedure) have been approved [...] Guidelines have been drawn up to assist in the development of service standards and the introduction of reglaments. In addition, officials from ministries, regional trainers and akimats have undergone training on the introduction of reglaments and performance indicators (2008: 489-490).

Overall, the government has made large investments into civil service training to bring new knowledge on service integration from different parts of the world and adapt these ideas to the local political, societal, technological and economic situation. Many of the variations of this basic idea have been successful in other countries in reducing administrative burdens on businesses and the public, especially on license and permit requirements. However, there was no universal concept of single-window arrangements which were implemented in a vast number of combinations and variations across developed and developing countries.

Despite high expectations from these study trips, the participants were not able to provide a clear policy advice on how to create joined-up services and introduce single-window centres. The participants of the training courses were eager to explain the visible part of single-window centres, such as the modern design of the offices, large open spaces, access for the disabled, availability of booklets and information boards about services, space for children to play etc. In fact, the Kazakhstani government has succeeded in creating a user-friendly physical environment within the OSS, which was described in the previous chapter (Chapter 4). The international consultants from the World Bank and EU Tacis provided a positive evaluation of the OSS policy progress, admitting that the Kazakhstani single-window centres had nearly met international standards and could even serve as examples of best practice for some European countries (Avvalova, 2009). The international observers positively assessed the physical customer service environment, which in itself is not

able to improve service quality and reduce corruption without more fundamental organisational and cultural changes in the service delivery processes both at the front-office (OSS) and back-offices of the traditional departments.

Traditional departments were used to being separated by professional and organisational boundaries, in an environment of mistrust, lack of exchange of information, and in constant battle with political leaders over power and resources. There was a lack of literature on the managerial reforms available in Russian and Kazakh languages. Information on public service reforms was available only through the participants of the study visits, a few international consultants and Russian web-sources.

Following the recommendations of the first working group, the MJ was assigned coordinating functions as it provided legal services (for example, marriage/birth registration, business/property registration), which were highly demanded, socially and economically significant among citizens and entrepreneurs. Overall, three types of services which were perceived as highly corrupt by the public - legal, tax and land registration - were selected for the pilot roll-out of the single-window service provision (Jandosova et al., 2002). At the initial stage of policy implementation the government's actions provided evidence of serious intentions to reduce administrative burdens on the citizens and business organisations. Table 9 presents the list of services delivered through the single-window centres from November 2005 to December 2008.

Table 9: List of OSS Services, November 2005 – December 2008

Ministry of Justice (16 services)	Agency for Land Resource Management (4 services)	Tax Committee (4 services) (Nov 05-Dec 06)	Ministry of Defence (5 services) (from Jan 07)
Issuing a passport, ID; registration of residence; birth; death; marriage; property registration; business registration etc.	Land registration	Tax services	Registration of military officials in reserve; application for benefits for the participants of the World War II, Afghan war.

As Table 9 illustrates, the type of priority public services selected for single-window provision are related to different types of registration, which enables the government to monitor and control customers (for example, their current residence, urban/rural movements, business activities etc.). Given the difficult socio-economic situation in the country, with high levels of poverty, unemployment, limited access to basic public services (for example, in terms of access to safe drinking water), especially in the rural regions, the Kazakhstani customers might have had more demand in social and health care services compared to the service users in welfare countries. However, the choice of priority services characterises the nature of traditional bureaucracy in Kazakhstan, which is used for centralised control over citizens, whereas the top e-services in Europe include, along with legal registration, social and health care services for the citizens of European Union (EU). Another important observation is that OSS services have been selected without consultation with the service users, thus, the key principle of the NPM concept, such as “customer-orientation” was ignored.

The traditional bureaucracy considers civil service as a means of power and personal benefits where personal interests dominate over public interests. In response to the question “How was the list of OSS services selected?”, the political manager of the MJ replied:

We [the MJ] know what our citizens want and what they need. For example, we calculated that every citizen will visit OSS at least five times in their life: birth, getting passport, registration of residence, marriage, and registration of property. We made the decision ourselves, and I think that it was the right decision. Of course, gradually we will persuade other government bodies to deliver their services through OSS.

Decisions on the scope of services through single-window centres were made by the central government without an evaluation of customers’ needs following the traditional pattern of work in which the government has historically dominated over interests and demands of the citizens. For example, the list of new services launched since January 2009 included registration of railroad carriage, confirmation on the absence of adjudication, while other services were socially-orientated (application for state nursery care, registration for municipal housing etc.). The customer-

orientation principle has not been implemented to a full extent by the traditional bureaucracy. With regard to the policy progress, the government has not attempted to approach service users to assess their views on service quality and performance of the single-window centres (Chapter 9 provides the findings of the survey evaluation of the OSS among the public conducted by the Sange Research Centre). While declaring “customer-orientation” as a priority in administrative reform and introducing this principle into many strategic and legal documents, the Kazakhstani government has not taken into account needs and expectations of the service users.

This section has explained how the government designed the OSS policy and why particular services were selected for single-window provision by exploring the public sector context. The following sections continue to analyse policy implementation at different stages of development by identifying policy successes and limitations, as well as challenges that have constrained service improvement. In particular, the underlying factors and power dimensions between the key actors that explain a shift from the original policy vision are examined below.

5.1.2 Piloting Single-Access Model of Service Delivery

This section considers the OSS policy development at the pilot stage. Figure 5 presents a pilot model of the OSS as a single-access point of service delivery which functioned from November 2005 to December 2006. Pilot projects were launched in the four OSS: two offices in Astana and two in Almaty.

Figure 5: Single-Access Model of the OSS

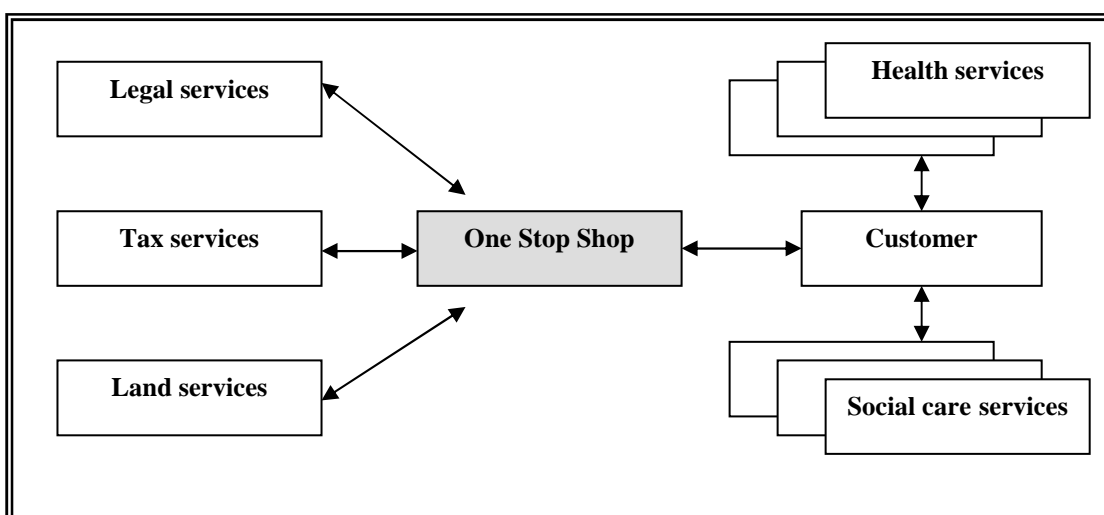


Figure 5 shows that the pilot OSS provided *single, joined-up* access to the services of three stakeholder departments - MJ, ALRM and the Tax Committee. These stakeholders worked in close cooperation with the single-window centres, however, they were still reluctant to share information about clients with each other. The front-line staff did not make decisions on applications, then, the emphasis was on the quick and correct acceptance of applications, and the delivery of documents. From the very beginning of policy implementation technical functions were assigned to the front-line employees, who played the role of “mediators” between service providers and customers (Janenova, 2008a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010d).

The strategic change from the earlier practice was delegation of front-line customer service to the OSS (consultation of the customers, application submission), while other administrative processes on application review and decision-making remained at the traditional departments. Single access point at the OSS enabled clients to apply for a range of public services provided by the three stakeholders at one visit. It allowed customers to save time and costs, and avoid bureaucracy during their application for public services.

Service delivery through single access posed significant challenges for the government officials who were used to work within strict professional and organisational boundaries. In the top-down, hierarchical and inertial public sector the civil servants were encouraged to shift professional and organisational boundaries, initiate changes for service improvement and learn to work in close cooperation with a range of stakeholders, including the business sector and NGOs. For the purpose of illustration Figure 6 presents an overview of policy development from the pre-OSS stage towards the future OSS stage using the case of the passport application service.

Figure 6: Policy Development - Passport Application Service

Key components	Pre - One Stop Shop stage	OSS stage	Future OSS
Characteristics	<i>Paper phase</i>	<i>Front-line service (paper phase)</i>	<i>E-government</i>
	Separate, fragmented services in different locations Application submission, support services (photo, banking, copying) delivered in different locations	Separate, fragmented services in one location Consultation, application submission and support services - in one place	Integrated services (online or paper by user's choice)
	Lack of accountability to the public; limited access to service information	Introduction of service standard and regulations, grievance system; transparent access to service information	Transparent and accountable government; equal access to services, social inclusion
	High corruption	Lower corruption	No corruption
	Illegal payments to accelerate speed of service	Legal payments to accelerate speed of service	
Locus of activity	Local departments of justice	OSS	Work/home (online), OSS
Information flows	One way: from service users to government	One way: from service users to government	Two-way (interactive): government-to-customer
Technology employed	Paper and computer records	Paper and computer records, informational services online and in call-centre	Centralized database, transactional services online

Figure 6 illustrates that in the pre-OSS stage customers applied for passports at the local departments of justice. Information on the service requirements was distributed orally by one or two employees and was not available by phone or online, for this reason citizens had to visit twice or even three times (in case they missed some information) and spend time in the long queues to get the initial information and

application form, and then to submit the application. The service users also had to run between three other places: to take a photo, to pay service fee at the bank and to make copies of the documents, as support services were not provided at the local departments of justice. The citizens in the large cities, where demand for this service was much higher than in small towns and rural areas, had to take a day or two of unpaid leave from their work in order to have enough time to apply for a passport. Illegal practices were widespread as the clients wished to accelerate the speed of service and avoid queuing. The MJ was widely criticised for poor performance, limited access to information on service and corrupt practices.

The situation has changed and moved in a more positive direction after introducing single-window centres. The MJ started to introduce changes from its own organisation by selecting popular services including the application for a passport. Now the customers can apply for a passport during one visit, which should take no more than 40 minutes (Ministry of Justice, 2007). Information on service requirements has become available through multiple channels: during face-to-face consultation with staff, on the information boards at the OSS and online, on the websites of the e-government portal and MJ (<http://www.egov.kz>; <http://www.minjust.kz>). Support services such as taking a photo, copying documents, and banking services are now available within the single-window centres. While the customers were responsible for filling in the application forms themselves in the earlier practice, now it is the responsibility of a front-line employee to fill in application. The customers receive a confirmation paper, which contains the name of the front-line operator who has accepted the application, a list of submitted documents, date, time and location of where the passport will be issued. In the earlier practice the clients were accustomed to giving illegal payments to accelerate the speed of service, whereas now the customers have an alternative of paying an extra legal fee, if they wish, to reduce time required for passport delivery. According to the Public Service Standard (Ministry of Justice, 2007), issuing a passport is normally provided within 30, 45 or 60 days depending on the distance of the local OSS to the regional level, and for extra fee the service is available within 15 days or 5 days. As soon as the customers improve their computer literacy and get better access to the

Internet, they will be able to apply for passport online at their home or work computer or through single-window centres.

This example of the passport application service illustrates that within a short period of policy implementation the government has progressed in improving access to information about public services by introducing a consultation scheme through face-to-face meeting, phone and online, publishing service standards, thus, reducing administrative bureaucracy for customers. As the information about service requirements became transparent, access to the service was improved, and official fees were introduced to accelerate the speed of service, corrupt opportunities for officials have been significantly reduced.

However, the pilot model of single-window service delivery had a number of limitations and weaknesses, which proved constraining in terms of implementing service integration to the full extent. Improvement of public services delivered at the OSS was made in terms of the front-line customer service rather than making fundamental changes of the front-office and back-office processes. Modern offices with more convenient conditions were introduced, and applications for a range of services and support services were provided in one place, however, the processes of applications review and decision-making remained unchanged. In relation to the stakeholder departments delegated to the single-window centres, their functions on consultation and application submission as well as delivery of processed documents, continued in separation from each other following the traditional pattern of work. As a result, pilot public services remained fragmented and non-integrated with the exception that they were made accessible at one single location.

It is useful to remember that each partner in a collaborative undertaking has something at stake and brings in a host of preconceived notions to the partnership. The stakes may be reputation, but often entail more substantive considerations as resources (people and funds), turf, autonomy, or control (Bardach, 1998). Large investments were put into the pilot projects allocating the best resources in the public sector. The case organisations and other OSS which were established at a later stage

were provided with modern offices, with new furniture and computer equipment. The stakeholders were obliged to send experienced staff to the new organisation as team leaders for the duration of the pilot projects. Team leaders conducted intensive training for newly recruited staff and managers of the OSS on a range of services from the three different areas (legal, tax and land registration). As described earlier, the foreign and local training institutions, as well as international consultants delivered workshops on the international practice of service integration for the managers of the MJ and OSS (for more detailed description of training policies see Chapter 7).

Several important points regarding the impact of the service integration policy on the power dimensions between key actors need to be emphasised. Firstly, in a certain way the new single-window centres were competing with traditional departments in terms of better public service delivery. The OSS provided the same services, but their purpose was to provide better quality and transparent services in a more comfortable space and in more accessible ways. As was mentioned earlier, the opening times of the OSS (9 a.m. – 8 p.m., Monday to Saturday without lunch time) were more convenient than those proposed by the traditional departments (normally 9 a.m. – 6 p.m., Monday to Friday with two-hour lunch time). Besides which, some government bodies accepted applications only on particular days and during limited period of time (for example, only until lunch time), whereas the OSS accepted applications throughout the whole working day. Politeness of the front-line employees presented a striking positive difference compared to the behaviour of the traditional bureaucrats who were generally perceived as indifferent, rude and unethical among the public (Jandosova et al., 2002).

Secondly, by being a *single* access point to the public services, the OSS were able to reduce personal contacts between civil servants and customers and corrupt opportunities for both sides. The front-line personnel were not able to influence on the application review process as they performed entirely technical functions by accepting and returning documents. The customers as well as front-line workers could not know *who* was going to review applications in the back-offices as

documents were distributed among officials on a random basis. This does not mean that the government officials could not still seek bribes to influence the results of application review, however, now they performed corrupt actions with much higher risk of being caught by the responsible authorities. Thus, the new policy encouraged traditional bureaucracy to become more transparent, more accountable and more cost-efficient in delivering better quality public services.

The third important point is that the MJ got access to the statistical performance data of the stakeholders in terms of number of processed, rejected and delayed documents, and speed of service. This type of performance information was previously inaccessible by the external organisations, which enabled the government bodies to interpret statistical data for their own benefit and submit better performance reports than the actual practice was. The central government had to rely on these reports combined with financial reports of the Audit Commission. There was also no tradition to conduct evaluation of the government performance based on the customers' views.

However, the service integration policy has changed the situation. In response to the public and government critique, the MJ was able to provide a report on the stakeholders' performance, which held collective responsibility for poor service quality. This might have influenced the image of some political managers. Thus, the OSS could be used by the central government to monitor and compare the performance of the government bodies based on more reliable and transparent information of the integrated computer system. The service integration policy had the potential to offer remedies to "monopolies-of-information situations", where the government bodies were used to withholding information from citizens and businesses, and restricting equal access and social inclusion in order to get illegal payments for public service provision.

Given the combination of these factors, it was not surprising that the new initiative of service integration through single-window arrangements faced strong, aggressive resistance and scepticism expressed by the political managers. During one year of the

pilot project the central government held a series of debates between members of the government on the strategy of the OSS development in terms of the type of services, functions and potential new stakeholders of the OSS. As the policy was supported at the highest political level, the ministers could not reject the idea of service integration explicitly. By contrast, they expressed enthusiasm, and some of them introduced the single-window approach within their own organisations to avoid joining the OSS project. The terms “one stop shop”, “customer orientation”, “improving service quality” became popular, fashionable slogans, which were frequently used in the official speeches of politicians to demonstrate their dedication to the Presidential strategy for public service modernisation. However, the actual implementation of the service modernisation reform was a complex and contradictory process.

The international practice suggests that government bodies might be reluctant to hand over competence and activities as this can bring a potential loss of power over human, legal and financial resources (Flumian et al., 2007). For example, in response to the initiative expressed by the MJ to deliver selected social and health care services through single-window centres, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population (MLSP) and Ministry of Healthcare (MH) resisted this idea. Both ministries expressed concerns regarding provision of their services by “non-specialists”, i.e. front-line personnel who did not have degrees in social and health areas. The MLSP introduced single-window arrangements in the regional labour departments to deliver services for job search, training and re-training of the unemployed. Professional and organisational boundaries posed significant challenges to the service integration policy as different groups of professions attempted to protect their interests and job safety and were reluctant to share information and cooperate with colleagues from government departments specialising in other areas.

Using the cases of two different services: “application for a driving license” and “tax registration”, the following examples analyse the reasons for resistance towards the new policy expressed by the government officials, and changes of the nature of relationships between key stakeholders as the policy has progressed. One of the services selected by the President among those to be piloted in OSS was the

“application for a driving license”. The Traffic and Administrative Police (TAP) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of RK is responsible for issuing driving licenses, which is perceived to be a highly corrupt service among the public, businesses and government officials (Jandosova et al., 2002; Jandosova, 2007).

To protect the personal interests of the political and administrative managers it was not surprising that TAP expressed strong resistance to the delegation of this service to the OSS. TAP introduced its own single-window centres to improve customer service. In October 2007 in his interview to the newspaper “Kazakhstanskaya Pravda” the Chairman of the Committee for Traffic Police, Mr. Omurzak Tussumov, informed:

the work of registration departments in traffic police has been re-organised on the basis of single-window arrangement since 2004 to improve quality of service, reduce time for customer service and personal contacts with population. (Lukyanina, 2007)

Following his argument the traffic police introduced the single-window arrangements even earlier (in 2004) than the actual service integration policy, which was launched in February 2005. The promises by many politicians, which have never been fulfilled caused a negative reaction from the citizens. For example, there were 38 comments written by the readers of this interview on the web-site <http://www.zakon.kz>, of which 37 users criticised the poor performance of the traffic police and shared examples from personal experiences of giving bribes to the traffic policemen, and only one comment from a traffic policemen who complained that they (i.e. policemen) had to take bribes as they gave illegal payments to their management and worked for 12 hours a day for miserable payment in order to meet quantitative targets.

I visited the single-window centres organised by the TAP in Astana to compare customer service there with the OSS introduced by the MJ. In autumn 2007, there was one single-window centre of the TAP in the capital with a population of over a million people. Later it turned out that there were two OSS of the TAP at that time, but the information on the second one was not shared with the public, so most

customers visited this particular office. The office was located outside the city, about 30 minutes drive by car, with limited access to public transport. The area around the office presented overcrowded chaos consisting of cars, drivers, police cars and it was hard to find a parking space.

There was literally a single window desk in the TAP where services were provided. In order to reach the front-line staff it would take from one to three hours of queuing along with other tired and angry clients. When I reached the customer desk, it turned out that it was time for lunch, and the window was closed in front of my face. Most customers preferred to stay in the queue during the lunch time in order not to lose position in the queue so I followed their example. The customers came to apply mainly for two types of services: to register a car or to apply for a driving license. While we were standing in the queue, people complained about the poor performance of the TAP service, bribe-seeking behaviour of the traffic policemen and employees of this particular OSS, shared their life stories related to their experiences of getting services at this organisation for illegal payments.

When the window was finally opened, the front-line employee looked through my documents and told me to pay a service fee at the local bank and then return with the payment confirmation. In response to the question why it was not possible to pay there to save time, the official replied sharply that these were the rules, and she could not do anything about that, and directed her attention to the next customer. The next day I returned, queued for the second time, and finally submitted the documents. One person, a “mediator”, approached me with a proposal to accelerate the speed of service for additional illegal fee, which I refused to do.

Overall, the single-window of the TAP represented the traditional service provision and did not contain elements of service integration in the sense of reducing administrative burdens, and making information more transparent and accessible. However, despite the general public critique and complaints against the corrupt services of the TAP, the service on application for a driving license continued to be

delivered by the responsible authority and not included in the list of public services provided through single-window arrangements.

Compared to the TAP practice, experience of the Tax Committee as one of the OSS stakeholders at the pilot stage presents an example of good practice. Tax services were also acknowledged to be highly corrupt by the government officials, businesses and civil society (Jandosova et al., 2002), as well as by the Tax Committee itself, which elaborated the Strategy of Corruption Control at the Tax Authorities. The Tax Committee has progressed from face-to-face service provision to the online service delivery very rapidly. The Chairman of the Tax Committee attracted the best qualified IT experts from other government bodies and the business sector to develop innovative, technological solutions to improve service quality. Specialists from two different professions, tax and IT, were encouraged to work together and develop recommendations on the improvement of service quality. As the senior manager of the tax service department described this process:

For the first time in our practice we, tax consultants, were sitting with computer experts and explaining to them the problems we encountered in the process of service provision, and what difficulties our customers faced, so basically we told them what we wanted to improve. The IT guys returned to us with suggestions on how our ideas could be implemented in practice with the use of modern technologies. [...] We were divided into small working groups, each working on a specific issue, for example, one group was dealing with tax service delivery for business clients, another – for civil servants, etc. Then we gave presentations and feedback on each group's work. That was fascinating! Tax experts learnt some computer terminology and now they speak the same language as the IT guys, together we have developed innovative projects, which none of the government bodies has implemented!

This quote illustrates enthusiasm and drive for quality improvement expressed by the Tax Committee, which was awarded for the “Best E-Service in the Public Sector - 2006”. The Tax Committee launched tax service provision online at the portal <http://www.taxkz.kz>, both for business clients and citizens who were able to submit tax reports in electronic form. The Tax Committee elaborated and published guidelines with detailed explanations on the tax application procedures online. Face-to-face customer service of the Tax Committee was also significantly improved after introducing single-window centres within their organisations. Thus, the Tax

Committee represented a strong stakeholder for the OSS project: they have adopted an open environment for innovations and information exchange, they had already accumulated experience in service integration within a single organisation by the time the pilot projects were launched. The Tax Committee had a team of qualified tax and IT experts who learnt to work across professional boundaries and could share their experience with other stakeholders. The employees from the Tax Committee were keen and enthusiastic to work with the MJ within the single-window project as this was a new challenge for their organisation. One of the IT experts from the Tax Committee who was involved in the pilot project noted:

We are now developing a web-site for the OSS to give information to citizens on the services that OSS deliver, and this web-site will be linked to the Tax Committee e-portal. So clients will have opportunity to apply for tax services both at the OSS and online. We have also developed an electronic system for tracking the flow of documents between OSS and Tax Committee to reduce lost and delayed tax applications. So everyone, we and OSS, will know exactly the position of each document at a specific time.

The representatives of the Tax Committee, tax manager and IT expert, whom I interviewed in December 2006 during a study visit to the Netherlands, who were keen to cooperate with their colleagues from the single-window centres. However, they did not always know the intentions of their political managers, who initiated leaving the OSS pilot project during this period of time. The Minister of Finance, Mrs. Natalya Korzhova, raised concerns that the OSS pulled back tax service provision due to the low professionalism of the front-line staff. She refused to sign the draft government resolution that would stipulate the official functioning of the pilot OSS. In order to reach a consensus with the Ministry of Finance and other stakeholders who expressed resistance to the delegation of their services to the single-window centres, the MJ had to play trade-offs and make strategic changes in the original design of the policy.

First, the Tax Committee left the OSS despite certain positive achievements of the pilot project in tax service delivery. Second, the OSS were assigned service delivery on the basis of *alternative* rather than *single* access along with the stakeholders as key service providers. The central government made a decision that the OSS would

continue to deliver legal services on the single-window arrangement whereas the rest of the selected services would be provided both by the OSS and responsible government authorities. A more detailed description of shifting from the single-access to the alternative-access model is presented below in the following sections. The senior manager of the MJ commented in this regard: “We had to make a step backward. It was the price to push the reform. Otherwise they would have not adopted the legal document on OSS establishment”.

Hence, in January 2007, OSS were assigned the legal status of “state enterprise”, i.e. they were funded by the state budget, and staff changed their status from “civil servants” to “public sector employees” signifying lower salary, less social benefits and a lack of career prospects. Overall, reducing the status of the OSS employees has had negative impact on the progress of policy implementation.

This section has analysed the design of the policy, establishment of the pilot projects and nature of interactions between key stakeholders at the early stage of policy implementation. The next section moves onto the discussion of the policy implementation at the second stage: when the pilot experience was rolled-out across the regions replacing the model of the single-access with the alternative-access model of service delivery.

5.1.3 Shift towards Alternative-Access Model

As was described earlier in this chapter, the main purpose of the OSS was stipulated by the legislation as “the provision of public services based on the one stop shop principle to accept applications and deliver processed documents.” Since the launch of the policy the functions of the front-line staff were limited to technical operations, such as checking for mistakes, accepting documents and sending them to the stakeholder department, i.e. serving as ‘mediators’ between customers and service providers rather than being a service provider in itself. International practice suggests that single-windows can be used not just as a physical access points to services and

information, but as a single access point at which decisions are made (Hagen and Kubicek, 2000).

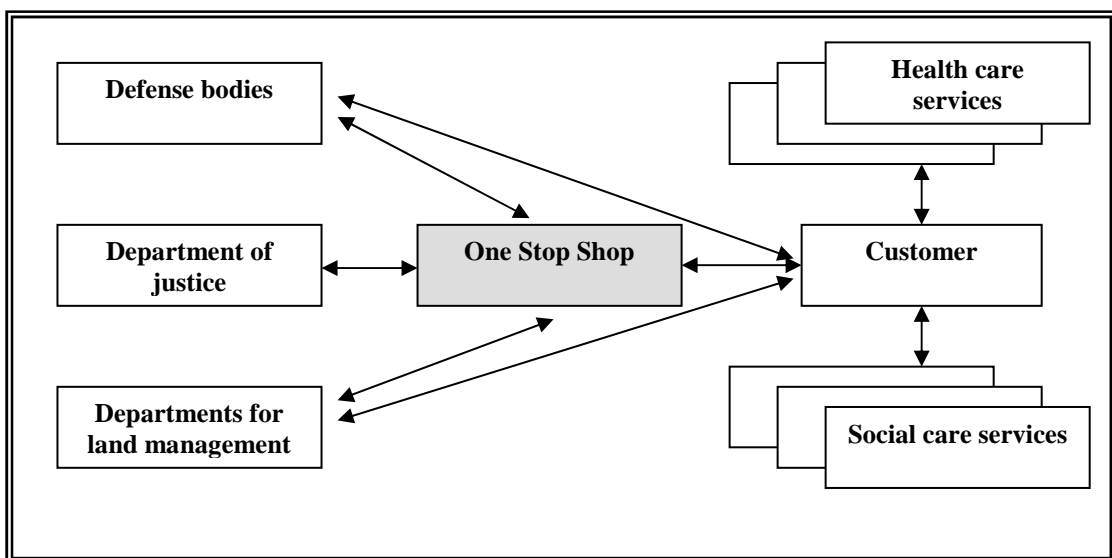
However, the Kazakhstani government has chosen a less challenging option in terms of service integration under pressure by the political managers. The politicians were interested in keeping control over service provision, thus, keeping personnel, resources and power, rather than delegating service delivery to the new stakeholder. At the same time the central government had to report on the successful implementation of the Presidential initiative and, despite the resistance of the political managers, government resolution on the establishment of single-window centres was adopted. The government managed to meet political ambitions to show the international community its intentions to build an effective and efficient public service system.

In January 2007, after losing the Tax Committee as an important strategic stakeholder, a new partner, the Ministry of Defence (MD) joined the single-window project. The MD was the only government body which agreed to provide selected services through OSS. Although initially the MD was not considered as a potential stakeholder for the single-window centres given the specific nature of its services, it turned out that registration of residence, a service delivered through OSS, depended on the registration of military servants in reserve, a service of the MD. In order to change residence address the clients needed to provide a confirmation from a local defence body that they were taken off the military record at the former area of residence and registered in the new area of residence. Thus, registration of residence at the pre-OSS stage normally could take a week because the clients had to travel between the local department of justice and two defence bodies, one in the former area of residence and second – in the new location, and line up in three different queues.

In response to the initiative from the MJ to deliver the service on registration of military servants in reserve at the single-window centres, at first the MD did not express enthusiasm. The managers from the defence bodies argued that they could

not delegate military registration to the OSS given the lack of front-line staff' competence in their specific field, and national security issues related to database access. After six-months of negotiations and a series of seminars, both sides managed to reach a consensus: service for registration of military servants in reserve was delivered at the OSS by the staff of the MD. Two fragmented services of the MJ and MD were brought in one physical location – OSS –, which enabled for both service providers and customers to save time and costs. The quality of both services improved in terms of reducing the speed of service and improving the accessibility of the service. However, the provision of two services in one location without integration at the back-offices (for example, by introducing unified database) could not change the nature of the administrative processes: civil servants at the MD continued to deliver services in the same way as at the pre-OSS stage with the exception that now this service was accessible in more convenient locations for customers. Figure 7 illustrates an alternative-access model of service delivery, which was adopted in January 2007 as a result of the long negotiations between the stakeholders.

Figure 7: Alternative-Access Model of the OSS



The key difference between the single-access model (Figure 5) and alternative-access model (Figure 7) was the emergence of two new arrows linking the government bodies (departments of defence and land resource management) and customers. From

January 2007, public services were provided on an alternative basis both at the responsible authorities and OSS. Only the MJ being a policy coordinator continued to deliver services entirely through the single-window centres. The concept of service integration policy has been undermined by this strategic change in the policy design. This model enabled the stakeholders to deliver services directly to the customers and through OSS, which left opportunities for corrupt activities and constrained service improvement in term of social inclusion and accountability. After two years of policy implementation the government still did not have a clear vision of the single-window model, the process of negotiations was accompanied by the antagonistic and contradictory relations among stakeholders. For example, the draft Concept of the OSS Development elaborated by the MJ and submitted for review to the Prime-Minister's Chancellery in 2007 was returned back to the coordinating authority for further development and has still not been approved at the time of finishing this research project. The Prime-Minister's Chancellery and the Ministry of Finance provided critical feedback on this document stating that it lacked thorough analysis of the situation, evaluation of the reform progress, clear performance targets, estimation of budget resources and action plans. According to this document the MJ had ambitious plans to increase the number of services provided through single-window centres during three stages: 32 new services of the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Transport and Communication, Culture and Information, General Procuracy and Local Municipalities were planned to be delegated in 2008. At the next stage, from 2009 onwards it was envisaged that 35 new services of the Ministries of Labour and Social Protection, Finance, and Internal Affairs would be added. Finally, from 2010 it was planned that 34 services within the Ministries of Education and Science, Energy and Mineral Resources, Health Care, Committee for Registry Service, as well as local municipalities would be provided at the OSS. However, in practice within two years of policy implementation from 2005 to 2007, the OSS still continued to deliver only 25 services, including 16 services of the coordinating authority. As the Prime-Minister, Mr. Karim Massimov, commented in this regard:

The population have many complaints because of disagreement in actions among the state bodies. Because of this the idea of OSS is discredited, it means that the task given by the Head of the state to simplify access to public services and reduce corruption with the use of OSS has not been implemented, in my view...

Unfortunately, I need to declare that some state bodies are not interested in delegating services to the OSS. Otherwise, how could one explain that during two years these centres have not yet developed and have not provided new services. (2007)

The government bodies were still reluctant to enter into collaborative arrangements as they did not perceive benefits from their involvement: ministers were concerned with potential incursions into their fields of responsibility, loss of power and resources as well as access to illegal payments (Janenova, 2009b; 2009c; 2010d). The President of RK emphasised the need to increase number of services delivered through OSS, which would enable a reduction in bureaucracy and make the work of the government more transparent (Nazarbayev, 2006c). Immediately, the government adopted the resolution that 32 new services of different state bodies would be provided through the single-window centres on an alternative basis from January 2009. The important observation is that the scope of new services included some *social care* services such as the application for child benefits, registration for municipal housing, provision of health care benefits for disabled people and registration for public nursery care, thus, indicating positive progress in making services more customer-oriented.

Although the single-window centres have achieved significant progress within a short period of time, Mrs. Zagipa Baliyeva was replaced by the new minister due to the series of corruption scandals (illegal practices of the MJ and OSS are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9). The new Minister, Mr. Rashid Tussupbekov, the former General Procurator, immediately initiated the delegation of the single-window centres to the local municipalities, arguing that the MJ, being a service provider in itself, should not coordinate the policy, particularly given the expansion of the services outside of the scope of the ministerial competencies. As an experienced politician with over 30 years of experience in the government including the last 9 years at the position of the General Procurator, representative of the Soviet Party system, he was not interested in continuing the confrontations of the MJ with other political managers. It was normal practice that the new political managers tried to initiate a new policy, which would be associated with their names rather than ensuring the continuity of public service reforms.

The new minister was much less enthusiastic about service innovation compared to his predecessor. Within a month of his appointment, Mr. Tussupbekov initiated the delegation of the coordination authorities over the OSS from the MJ to the Civil Service Agency. In an official letter to the Prime-Minister of RK, the newly appointed Minister of Justice suggested that it would be more reasonable delegating coordination functions of the OSS to the state body, which was not involved in this project as a direct service provider and had responsibilities to monitor government bodies' activities in public service field. For these reasons, in the view of the MJ, the proposed state body - the Agency - would be able to conduct more objective management and audit inspections over the service integration policy than the MJ, which was a direct service provider of the majority of OSS services. The MJ also highlighted the importance of the urgent delegation of coordination functions given the recent increase in the spectrum of services delivered through the single-window arrangements. It is worth noting the reaction of the political management of the Agency at this stage. The Agency was also not keen to take over the burden of the service integration. One of the reasons for the anxiety of the political managers was related to their unwillingness to inherit the negative history of the OSS, in relation to poor performance, corrupt scandals and many organisational problems.

Another reason was the fact that coordination over service integration policy in the Kazakhstani context put the responsible body at risk of being criticised by the politicians who resisted inter-departmental partnerships and service changes. In the Kazakhstani culture, relations and social networks possess more power and significance for the political elite compared to the moral and professional obligation of the public sector employees to serve the citizens' needs. The Agency suggested delegating coordinative authorities over the OSS to the local municipalities as they had better knowledge of the local customer needs and would be able to control service delivery more effectively than any central government body could do. The issue of delegation of the OSS to the local municipalities was raised at the earlier stage of policy implementation when the heads of akimats were asked to provide feedback to this initiative. The general response from the regions was not welcoming to this idea as the local municipalities lacked knowledge and the capacity to organize

integrated service provision and legal authorities to coordinate local departments of the government bodies. However, despite the resistance from the regions to take over leadership in modernising public services, the coordinating role over the single-window centres was delegated from the MJ to the local municipalities in January 2010. Hence, political barriers were important constraints to the integrated service governance.

The strategic changes made in the design of the OSS policy replacing the single-access model with the alternative-access model have significantly undermined the idea of service integration and service improvement. The MJ, as a single driver of the service integration reform, was unable to overcome resistance of the traditional bureaucracy. Many political managers disliked the enthusiasm of the MJ about service quality improvement given their concerns about rising power authorities of the OSS. The single-access model of service provision, which was successfully piloted was replaced by the less challenging and more acceptable alternative-access model that enabled the government bodies to continue to provide services directly to the customers and through OSS on an alternative basis, and engage in illegal practices.

5.2 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed how the new policy has progressed from the initial idea to the actual implementation, with particular emphasis on the three stages: design of the vision, piloting single-access model and shifting to the alternative-access model. The service integration policy was designed by the central government in consultation with government bodies, the political party “Nur-Otan” and international experts. The introduction of a single-access service delivery model (Figure 5) where public services were accessible only through OSS was a successful achievement of the policy at the pilot stage. The single-access model had real potential to reduce risks of corruption by eliminating direct contact between service providers and customers, improve quality of services by enabling equal access and social inclusion, and improving the accountability of the public sector by creating reliable monitoring

systems of government performance data. The policy faced strong resistance from the political managers, who were concerned about losing their power over personnel, resources, and access to illegal payments. Traditional bureaucrats avoided service integration by ignoring the policy and introducing their own single-window arrangements (for example, within Tax Committee, TAP). Confrontation at the political level has had negative impact on the relationships at the low-rank level resulting in resistance between the front-office (OSS) and back-office staff (government officials). Under the pressure of the political leaders the government replaced the original single-access model with alternative-access model (Figure 7), which meant that services were provided both by the government bodies and the OSS. Certain positive achievements in terms of public service provision have been made within a short period of policy implementation:

- information about public services has become more transparent;
- physical customer service environment has significantly improved;
- selected services have become more easily accessible;
- staff have learnt new knowledge and skills to deliver diversity of services in one place and working across different professions and organisations;
- consultation mechanism has become more transparent (involvement of international experts, political party and business association).

However, the alternative model of service delivery was not able to introduce fundamental changes to work practices at the government bodies. The OSS seemed to offer a sort of choice for citizens to choose services at the new public sector organisation or traditional departments. They provided the same services as the traditional authorities, but in a more comfortable space and in more accessible ways. As demonstrated by examples, service quality has been improved in terms of accessibility and speed of delivery by putting services together in one physical location rather than making changes of the administrative processes at the back-offices. The traditional bureaucrats continued to work without challenging their work practices from the customers' perspective. Where many countries have introduced more result-oriented management and set up an evaluation criteria for performance,

the government of Kazakhstan really concentrated its attention on improvement of the front-line service delivery without considering changes in the back-offices.

In NPM theory evaluation of customer satisfaction is one of the techniques to yield important data and improve quality. While the government declared customer-orientation principle as a slogan for public service reform, the citizens continued to be ignored in the policy-making process. The OSS services were selected without evaluation of customers' needs. The single-window centres introduced standards and regulations as performance measures following the NPM ideology. However, performance evaluation could not provide transparent and reliable information as it contained partial information because of the alternative model, which enabled the government bodies to avoid OSS when delivering services. The officials continued to have control over statistical data on their performance with limited access both by the public and central government. Further, the traditional bureaucrats could continue illegal practices as they had direct interactions with the clients and were able to influence on the results of the application review.

The research findings show that service integration policy has not been able to change service production processes mainly because change to a greater extent was not desirable for the traditional bureaucracy. Service integration policy has posed fundamental challenges to the traditional bureaucracy:

- (1) it competes with the government bodies in provision of the same services, but making them of better quality, in terms of accessibility, speed of delivery and public accountability;
- (2) it has the potential to reduce corruption;
- (3) it can provide reliable and transparent information on the performance data of the stakeholders.

Hence, in the top-down, hierarchical and corrupt system, service integration policy which promoted transparency, public accountability and social equality has been constrained by the institutional framework and culture of the traditional bureaucracy.

Following on from this the next chapter analyses power dimensions and relationships between the key stakeholders as well as control mechanisms applied within the customer service environment. In particular, it examines how the relationships between the traditional bureaucrats and customer-oriented bureaucrats have changed over time; the way the performance of the single-window centres is controlled and measured with the use of technologies and physical environment, and the management styles that have been adopted by the OSS managers. The limitations of the control system to measure both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of public services are given special emphasis in the following chapter.

6. POWER, RELATIONSHIPS AND CONTROL

As was highlighted in the literature review, understanding local culture and context is important in explaining the successes and limitations of managerial reforms in the transitional countries. This chapter analyses the change in power dimensions and relationships between the key stakeholders as the policy has progressed, and explores different types of control practices and managerial styles adopted within the single-window centres. In particular, the use of technologies and the physical environment as a means of control are explored in relation to the performance management of the front-line personnel. This chapter also examines how the OSS managers and staff have addressed the contradictory dilemma between quantitative and qualitative aspects of public services.

6.1 POWER DIMENSIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

This section examines the nature of relationships between: 1) the managers of the MJ, OSS and stakeholder departments; 2) the front-office and back-office personnel; and, finally, 3) the managers of OSS and staff. Understanding the power dimensions and nature of relationships at different levels (both political and administrative) helps to identify the constraints and challenges faced by the OSS managers and front-line staff in implementing the policy and examining how they addressed these issues.

6.1.1 Interactions between Key Actors

Figure 8 illustrates the diversity of the stakeholders involved in service integration policy, which enables to structure my analysis by the types of the stakeholders interacting with the OSS.

Figure 8: Interactions between Key Actors

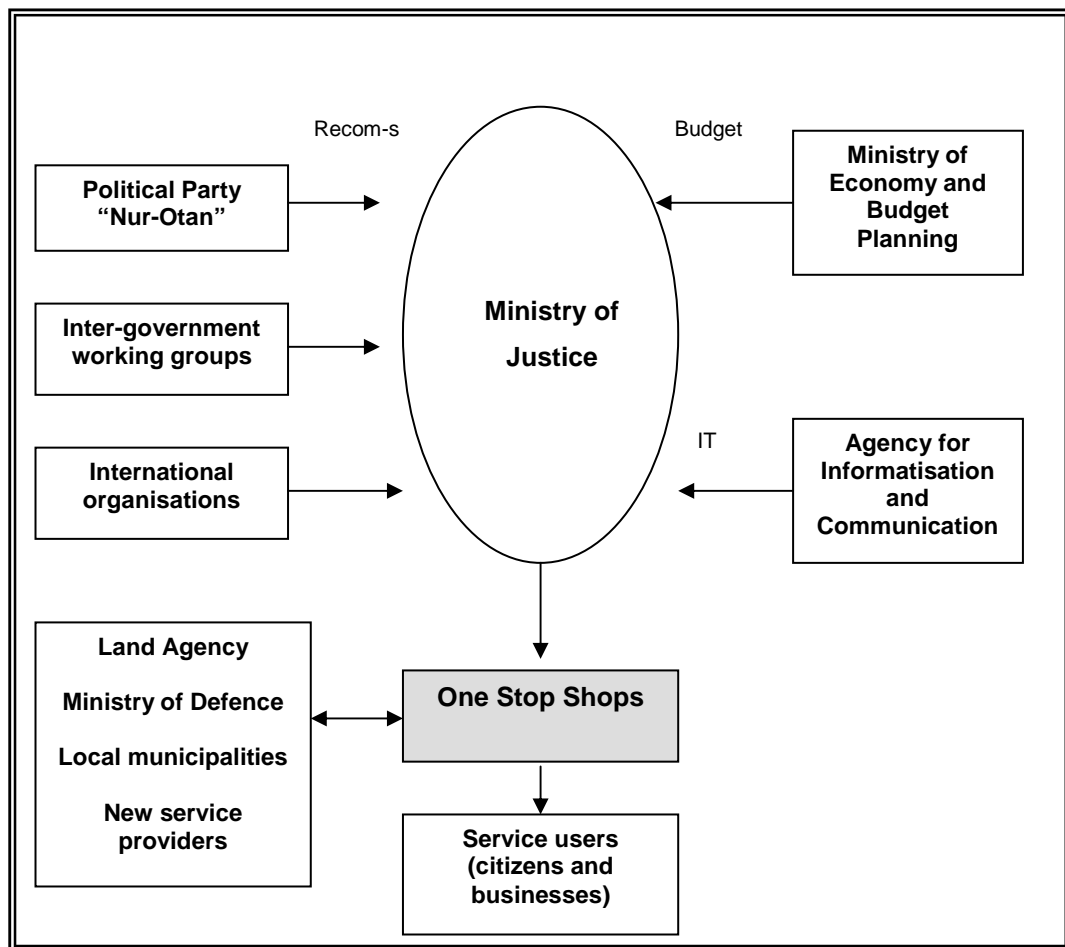


Figure 8 shows that the MJ, being the coordinating authority of the single-window policy implementation, closely interacted with the Ministry of Economy and Budget Planning to allocate appropriate funding for the OSS. The MJ involved inter-governmental working groups, political pro-presidential party “Nur-Otan” and international organisations to develop policy recommendations on the improvement of certain aspects of implementation. The Agency for Informatisation and Communication (AIC) provided consultative support and expertise on the technological side of the reform, for example, by assisting in the build-up of an integrated database among government departments. The AIC is responsible for e-government implementation, which aims to transform the OSS corporate network into a shared network for all government bodies in order to share information on services and clients. The type of relationships between the MJ and the OSS, as

illustrated in Figure 8, followed a traditional pattern: strict hierarchy, top-down vertical communication between the managerial staff. The MJ was responsible for maintaining all necessary conditions for proper functioning of the OSS. The senior managers of the MJ had powers to formulate the decisions of the policy concerning annual budget planning, service delivery methods, choice of technologies etc. The OSS had direct contacts with the local municipalities, the Agency for Land Resource Management (ALRM) and MD, which provided services through their regional departments. Communication with other stakeholders, which did not provide services through single-window arrangements such as international organisations, political party, business associations and the AIC took place only by approval of the MJ. It was the coordinating body which made decisions on the appropriateness of participation of the OSS managers in the discussions of policy issues among stakeholders.

Due to the lack of power in decision making at the local level, the OSS submitted regular reports to the centre and kept up daily communication with the MJ. According to the legislation the OSS had their own budgets and were supposed to have financial autonomy, thus, the government formally attempted to introduce the NPM principle on “letting the managers manage.” However, in practice whenever any expenditure was required for the single-window centres, for example, to purchase equipment, the OSS manager normally contacted the responsible manager at the MJ with a proposal to announce a tender. Tender advertisements were published in the local newspapers and online at the web-site of the MJ (the OSS still did not have their own web-sites as of December 2009). The OSS managers also requested permission from the MJ on the issues of remuneration and bonus payments for their staff. The OSS managers being concerned about their job security usually did not take any action without prior agreement and discussion with their coordinators from the MJ, thus, transferring culture of centralised control and hierarchical subordination to the new public organisation.

The OSS manager at the regional (*oblast*) level was appointed by the Minister of Justice, and the managers of the OSS at the village (*rayon*) level were appointed by the OSS manager at the regional level. However, in practice managers at the village level were recruited only by recommendations of the senior officials from the MJ. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, many OSS managers were former heads of the local departments of justice who had professional and personal connections with the political management of the MJ (more detailed discussion on the personnel policies is presented in Chapter 7). A well-designed IT system, discussed in more detail below in this chapter, established a corporate network between the OSS in the regions and the MJ which enabled the coordinating body “to know everything what is going on, even the behaviour of staff and managers”(unstructured interview, manager, MJ, January 2008).

This section examines the nature of interactions between the managers of the coordinating body, OSS and stakeholder departments. The type of relationships between the MJ and OSS is typical of the Kazakhstani administrative systems characterised by strong power at the centre. The OSS represented operative branches of the MJ in the regions being controlled through a hierarchical and centralised system imposed by the coordinating authority. The following discussion explores the nature of the relationships at the administrative level: between the front-office and back-office personnel (i.e. government officials in the stakeholder departments) and how they managed to move from initial resistance towards cooperation to the design and delivery of services through single-window arrangements.

6.1.2 Front-Office and Back-Office: From Resistance to Partnership

This section examines how relationships between the front-office and back-office staff have transformed during the policy implementation progress, why the traditional bureaucrats were antagonistic towards customer-oriented bureaucrats, and how stakeholders managed to overcome resistance and learn to work across professional and organisational boundaries.

As was highlighted earlier in this chapter, the front-office employees worked directly with customers, whereas the main focus of the back-office staff was on operational efficiency. The result of the operator's work, i.e. providing a document to the client, was dependent on the approval and processing of applications by his/her colleagues from the responsible authority. Given the different nature of work, the two sets of employees were put in a relationship of mistrust. One of the major challenges constraining successful service integration was the cultural dilemma of when the personal interests of the political leaders undermined the broader policy objectives. As was described earlier in this chapter, the government bodies resisted cooperating with the single-window centres as the latter posed a threat in terms of taking power over finances, personnel and resources. The lack of mutual understanding and competition for budgets and resources between the politicians constrained building trustful relationships between the front-office and back-office staff. Due to the lack of encouragement from the politicians to enter into joint projects, both the front-office and back-office staff felt isolated from each other and perceived each side with a high degree of mistrust. As the operator put it:

We have no communication with the government officials by phone or e-mail, only through correspondence which is dry, and doesn't sound encouraging for developing trust relationships.

Another operator remarked that, "there has always been a gap between the OSS and government bodies – us and them [...] It is a kind of paper war." The tension in the relationships between the back-office of the government bodies structured as a traditional bureaucracy and the front-office of the single-window centres organised along the lines of a customer-oriented bureaucracy was not surprising. Part of this antagonism relates to the fact that the civil servants perceived themselves as "specialists", "professionals", and viewed the front-line staff of the OSS as "non-professionals", "non-specialists" because the latter group might not have a degree in the area of specific services (in fact, they were not required to have a special degree when they were recruited). The concept of joined-up service delivery posed a significant challenge to the traditional bureaucracy, which was used to working within professional and organisational boundaries (tax consultants in the tax committee, land experts in the land departments, social workers in the social care

departments etc.). Service integration policy suggested that public services could be delivered to the customers by “non-specialists”, who were required to have good social skills and the ability to perform routinised tasks under pressure (as described in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8). The fact that the front-line employees did not need to have a special education to deliver a range of public services threatened job security and the specialisation of the civil servants. While more services were gradually delegated to the single-window centres and more resources were allocated to organise efficient front-line customer service, the traditional bureaucrats became concerned about losing their jobs as a result of downsizing state apparatus.

Further, service integration policy challenged the traditional bureaucracy by encouraging them to become more transparent and accountable to the public, and to share information across organisational and professional boundaries. In the context of political inertia, “due largely to a highly centralised state dominated by an elite form of decision-making” (Knox, 2008: 479), the civil servants were used to working in “segmented” organisations, they “treat information as owned rather than shared, and take decisions on the basis of specialism and expertise” (Kanter, 1983: 146). As one front-line employee expressed, the general feelings among many colleagues was that “civil servants think that we are not clever enough to do their jobs.”

Another part of such antagonism was the difference in the dominant modes of expression in the single-window centres and stakeholder departments. In the front-line jobs the main medium of communication in the interactions with customers was verbal. By contrast, the main mode of expression for the back-office staff while processing the application, was the written word. Indeed, the written word and the document could be regarded as the essential bureaucratic mode of communication. The government officials were not fully aware of the emotional and psychological burden demanded by the face-to-face customer service. One of the former civil servants who became an operator at the single-window centre remarked in this regard:

I have never thought that it was so difficult to communicate with clients. My former work was entirely focused on the documentation, whereas here in the OSS I spend all the time talking with customers, and that is a tough job, I must say! But my former colleagues don't understand it as they haven't experienced such intensive customer service.

The clash between different approaches to work and modes of expression had become manifest in the civil servants' complaints that the front-line staff had low competency and, for this reason, accepted applications with errors, which had negative impact on overall performance. In fact, the return of unprocessed applications and delays in the provision of documents created a negative image of the single-window centres at the early stage of policy implementation. The clients did not want to understand explanations of the front-line staff that applications were reviewed in the government bodies, not in the OSS, and sent complaints about poor performance of the OSS to the MJ and mass media. Moreover, some operators shared their suspicions about intentional delays in application review by the back-office employees that resulted in the public criticism against the performance of the single-window centres.

Strict segmentation of the front-office from the back-office had clearly negative implications for management aims, particularly in terms of failures in communication between the two sides of the system. Similar to their political leaders, many administrative managers from the government bodies were also concerned about their power, status and access to the illegal payments, all of which were put at risk by the new policy. As was described in Chapter 5, the clash between the traditional and customer-oriented bureaucracies resulted in changing the original design of the policy replacing the single-access model with the alternative-access model of service delivery. The traditional bureaucracy successfully managed to protect the interests of the political and administrative managers which, paradoxically, reduced confrontation between the front-office and back-office employees.

The antagonistic reaction expressed by the political leaders towards the MJ and OSS has been reduced after the alternative-access model of service provision was adopted: the new policy did not pose threats to their power any more. Over time as a result of intensive negotiations and on-the-job training sessions, the managers from the OSS and stakeholder organisations have developed more trustful relations compared to the early stages of the policy implementation, and become more open to discuss ideas on designing joined-up services, sharing information and building integrated databases. An OSS manager described this process in the following way:

We work in close coordination with the managers of the government bodies, we call each other every day, in case of a delay of documents, and we try to solve it efficiently without causing problems for our clients. We have small working groups consisting of our staff and representatives of stakeholder departments around each area of service, where the members negotiate on service processes, reach agreement, inform and train other groups.

The above quote is confirmed by the statement of another manager who stated that the managers from the stakeholder departments provided training for the front-line staff where they informed about amendments to the relevant legislation, provided professional advice within the scope of their competencies. These training sessions enabled the creation of friendly environments for sharing knowledge and experience among the key stakeholders, and learning from each other.

Both comments from the OSS managers suggest an encouraging sign on the changing nature of the relationships between the front-office and back-office personnel. The managers and front-line staff at the OSS have gradually developed more trustful relationships with the government officials compared to their relations at the early stage of the policy implementation. In this respect, this research adds to previous research, which suggests that trust is a pre-requisite for effective service integration and partnerships (Bardach, 1998). The process of building mutual understanding and trust was characterised by regular discussions about varying work practices and methods of service delivery in different stakeholder departments.

At the launch of the policy, the aim seemed to be clear and straightforward: “specialists”, i.e. civil servants, should explain to the “non-specialists”, front-line staff, the aspects of service provision to help them to understand work practices in order to deliver multiple services. The legislative regulations related to the selected pilot services was collected with the intention of adapting and combining them in procedure guidelines for each service. However, the MJ and stakeholders realised that the legislation was highly descriptive, complicated, enormous in volume, and could not provide a clear picture on specific steps in service delivery. The MJ decided to develop user-friendly and short regulations as the guidelines for the front-line personnel, and public service *standards* for customers to provide information on the speed of service, required documents, opening times, costs and complaints procedure. The EU Tacis project, “Support to the development of public service standards” provided methodological guidance in drafting service standards and regulations for four ministries (Health, Labour and Social Protection, Finance and Justice) and two local municipalities (Shymkent oblast and Almaty City).

Regulations included information about the main principles of serving the key performance indicators on quality and accessibility of public services in a form and language accessible to service users (Knox, 2008: 489). Service standards and regulations were published on the web-site of the MJ and information boards at the OSS. The regulation contained the main principles of public service provision such as timeliness, quality, accessibility, politeness and the complaints procedure. Performance indicators to measure these principles were developed and introduced, however, with more focus on quantitative targets which were easier to set compared to qualitative ones. It was decided that instead of examining bulks of documents, it would be more effective and time saving if the civil servants could explain their own understanding of the work and specific process-related issues. However, the government officials faced difficulties in clearly articulating the process steps for delivering public services. The colleagues from one department could have different views on the same matter related to the service provision given highly descriptive nature of legislation that was open to various interpretations. Diversity of knowledge and backgrounds of the government officials led to long discussions on each step in

the cycle of service production. The questions from the front-office were addressed to those who were identified as professionals in a specific service area. Primary contradictions occurred when these questions could not be answered satisfactorily. In these cases the civil servants and the front-line staff who were former officials exchanged views on service procedures and brought in varying perspectives. The contradictions were mainly related to the gaps and differences existing between legislation and work practices, and to different ways of working among the front-office and back-office personnel who came from different organisations and professions. The senior manager of the MJ described this process in the following way:

We asked every stakeholder department and our subordinating organisations, such as the Property Centre and Committee for Service Registry, to draw a cycle of work process on each specific service, identify stages of this cycle, responsible positions, and write descriptions of work activities at each of the stages in one sentence. [...] This turned out to be not as simple as we initially expected. The government officials had no clear picture of what was happening with document in their organisation outside their department, they didn't track the progress of the documents review after they finished analysis within their scope of responsibilities. For example, the law department may not interact with the budget planning department and the technical evaluation unit within the same agency. When they have finally drawn models of service delivery, they told us that it was an extremely useful exercise for themselves to understand the full process.

Many contradictions were solved as a result of extensive negotiations among stakeholders on possible solutions including minor changes in the work practices of the government officials and adaptation of technologies to speed up the process. For example, both case organisations introduced on a pilot shared a database with the Property Centre which enabled the front-line staff to issue a document certifying the ownership of the property within 20 minutes instead of the previous standard to deliver a document within two days. Another example relates to the pilot roll-out of service provision through postal offices in remote regions launched in autumn 2007. Following the agreement of cooperation between the MJ and National Holding "Samgau", which coordinated postal services at that time, the post offices started to accept applications from the citizens and send documents to the nearest single-window centres. This cooperation was aimed at improving accessibility to the public

services for rural inhabitants as most of them did not have the funds to travel to the nearest OSS, which were often located hundreds of kilometres away. However, the rural citizens still remained in a disadvantaged position as the government officials traditional bureaucrats continued to seek bribes for delivering services which were not included within the scope of the OSS services. Management styles within the single-window centres and their impact on the organisational culture and relationships between the managers and front-line staff are analysed below.

6.1.3 Management Styles

The research findings signalled on the existence of various and sometimes contradictory methods of controlling staff. The analysis of responses expressed by the front-line staff brought to light three main categories of managers. These types of managers summarised complexities and the problems related to the control of the front-line workforce. The “innovative managers” were aware of the difficulties that this new way of working involved and developed a more open attitude in adopting new strategies for managing front-line employees. The “traditional managers” carried on treating staff as civil servants in a centralised way by giving orders, demanding strict discipline and discouraging any creativity. Finally, the “technological managers” solved the issue of control simply by relying more heavily on the use of technologies.

The “innovative managers” did not want to be considered solely as controllers. They did not perceive their staff as simple numbers, but as important participants of the customer service work.

I try to keep my staff updated with recent amendments in the legislation, strategy of the Ministry, not only with information about service procedures. It is important that my staff should be aware of the overall picture of reform and that the OSS is an important component in this picture. If you just talk about technical aspects, the conversation becomes dry.

Some of the “innovative managers” honestly admitted that they were not trained for the new role of the OSS managers, and they were willing to take training courses on customer service management and leadership. As one of the OSS managers commented in this regard:

I observed a cycle of service provision from the very beginning until the end, and this was very helpful because now I have a clear idea of the entire process. The OSS were new organisations in the public sector and, as a manager, I learnt through experience. I would like to know more about the management of customer service and team working from literature and experts.

The “traditional managers” represented those managers who tended to manage staff according to traditional techniques of control, which rely on personal surveillance.

If you walk around, you can notice who is working and who is not. If he or she is quick or slow. You don’t need to measure them, you just see and perceive.

The “traditional managers” knew staff personally and this had been a great help in controlling them.

Since you know staff, their characters and personalities, you can motivate them. It’s more difficult with new entrants but after some time we get to know each other.

The above quote emphasises that some managers still relied on personal knowledge of people for controlling staff. These managers adopted a traditional way of controlling employees which might create some problems with an increase in the number of the staff. At the period of doing the research project, because the number of personnel was not very large, both managers and workers could rely on personal knowledge. However, when employees become a larger group, this form of control may be changed to entirely electronic monitoring. The “traditional managers” were not completely against electronic monitoring, but were not too enthusiastic about finding new management techniques for controlling staff.

The last category of managers is composed of the “technological managers”. These managers controlled staff as if they were numbers and their focus was only on productivity. They believed that control which relied only on technology could be effective. As one of the “technological managers” commented:

If you think in terms of achieving goals, control with the help of IT is more effective and easier. You control them through computer monitors and video screens, and see how everyone is working in quantitative terms. It’s limiting, but from an efficiency standpoint, it’s simpler, more mechanical, easier and more objective.

This manager seems over-optimistic about the use of electronic monitoring. However, in this quote, one can note the deficiencies of control based solely on technological systems: one can control employees from a quantitative perspective, but it is difficult to check their qualitative standards. The form of control utilised by the “technological managers” did not involve any shared responsibilities on the part of employees. They simplified the methods of controlling staff by using ICT. However, this method of control is far from complete. Several employees complained about this form of control solely based on production targets:

It’s their job to control us. However, they should look not only at numbers, but also at the process of customer service, for example, they should ask clients how satisfied they are with our service. If you continuously receive the message that you are not meeting targets, you get depressed. I don’t think it’s positive for us to receive only negative messages.

Many front-line employees sought interactions and accountability as single individuals, however, control, based entirely on electronic tools, could miss out the social interactions in the workplaces. Irrespective of the type of managerial style, all managers had to rely on technologies to get information on staff performance. Thus, control in the single-window centres followed the bureaucratic pattern of the *quantitative* measurement of the work processes. The front-line employees were measured on and assessed against their ability to accept applications accurately and quickly. The service standard, which was an active part of management policy was to accept a minimum 30 documents a day. If an employee frequently repeated errors in accepting incorrect applications, he or she was sent for additional training to the stakeholder department. As a manager commented:

When our employee makes frequent mistakes, we deliberately send him or her to the civil servant at the stakeholder department who often returns the document unprocessed because of mistakes made by our operator. The operator can ask questions directly to this official, observe the process, remember, and is expected not to repeat the mistakes.

Consistent mistakes were addressed in performance appraisal, potentially leading to the cutting of bonuses. In order to stimulate motivation and increase performance results, the case study organisations introduced a scheme when those operators who provided services to fifty customers a day, could leave their workplace earlier. As a result, this scheme motivated female employees who had children and the double burden of work and domestic duties, whereas performance of other employees had not improved so far. Few employees seemed to be comfortable with the performance appraisal system. One operator stated that:

In the old practice we and managers did not know how many clients each employee had served. This allowed some staff to cheat the system and the others had to work hard without bonuses for their performance. Now figures tell a story of who works hard and who doesn't. I think this is fairer than it was.

However, the majority of employees were critical of the performance appraisal system:

I don't agree with the system. I don't want my every action to be counted. I don't want to be watched like this. But I would not raise this issue at the staff meetings as I don't want to have problems.

The managers could observe the actions of the staff through technological tools (computer system and video recording): when employees started working, when they logged off, when they took a break, if they were engaged in a conversation with a customer. As an OSS manager explained the use of a new technological system:

Look, here is an employee who is just starting the shift, she's connecting now. She switched on her PC at 9:01 and put on a badge. Then she will press a button calling for a customer. When she will accept the application, the system will show the number of the document, the title of the responsible authority where the application will be sent and deadline for issuing a document.

Despite promising advantages to the electronic monitoring system, the traditional practice of watching over the staff's behaviour was still widely utilised by the supervisors who were constantly present in the customer service area. Social interactions which relied on the visibility of the staff played an important role in the OSS. The limits of electronic monitoring had several implications for controlling staff. The front-line employees, knowing that their performance was constantly checked, their actions were perfectly visible from the monitor, and their conversations with customers were recorded, tried to discipline themselves.

Through the electronic system the managers were able to monitor each operator in terms of the number of applications accepted and speed of service. At first sight, electronic monitoring, by making employees' actions and performance visible, created an illusion of full control over the work processes: staff worked by following a regular pace, because they knew that they were watched. However, electronic monitoring did not give a definitive solution to the service quality improvement. Electronic monitoring generated employees' resistance to managerial control. The managers dictated the length of working day and breaks, and controlled the adherence to these strict rhythms through supervisors' personal surveillance and electronic monitoring. However, some employees resisted this rigidity, despite the fact that the supervisor could see them cheating.

We can have breaks of five to ten minutes every two hours. A break of five minutes is too short for me, I just can't have this short break. So [...] normally I extend this break. I know my supervisor can see me, but she never complained about this.

The supervisors appeared to be aware of these small violations, but overlooked them. The employees' resistance was not considered to be the main limitation of electronic monitoring. Watching over the staff, the traditional surveillance was still considered an important technique for exercising control. It was possible via electronic monitoring to follow every single move and word of the staff. However, managers did not rely solely on this method. At both case study organisations direct visibility of the staff played an important part in the exercise of control. As one supervisor

explained, being able to wander around the front-line desk provided an effective method for controlling employees and helping, if required.

If you are walking around, you can see if an operator is quick or slow. Of course, with the electronic system it has become easier to control them, you can time the length of each customer interaction. But if you see them, you can perceive if somebody is working hard or not.

According to the supervisors, their presence in the OSS enabled them not only to facilitate the exercise of control, but also helped staff to deal with critical situations.

Some customers have stereotypes that if employee is young, he or she is unprofessional and can be treated badly. Staff would immediately inform me about a difficult customer. In these situations I help to avoid conflicts by talking with clients, ensuring that service will be provided according to the legal procedures, and protecting our employees.

The supervisor's comment was reinforced by the operator's statement:

Eye contact with supervisor is important if something goes wrong. Our supervisor would approach us to help in dealing with difficult client.

Thus, the OSS management tended to ensure close monitoring and control of staff performance both through traditional personal surveillance and use of technologies. This section examined managerial styles adopted in the single-window centres: the "innovative managers" aimed to find new solutions to support staff in fulfilling their functions; the "traditional managers" continued to treat staff as civil servants through centralised ways of giving orders and demanding strict discipline; and finally, the "technological managers" controlled staff mostly with the use of technologies. Irrespective of the managerial style the OSS managers performed monitoring and control of staff both through traditional observation and use of the technologies. Thus, control within the OSS environment followed the bureaucratic pattern of the quantitative measurement of the work processes. The following section explores the use of different types of control mechanisms in order to measure and manage the performance of the OSS managers and front-line personnel.

6.2 CONTROL PRACTICES

This section presents the discussion of different types of control methods adopted within the single-window centres in order to measure and manage the performance of the OSS managers and front-line personnel. Particular emphasis is given to the contradictory dilemma between quantitative and qualitative characteristics of public service faced by the front-line staff, as well as the use of technologies and the physical environment as a means of control. It is argued that the utilisation of technological means and personal surveillance strengthened centralised control over the OSS and imposed threat over the front-line personnel.

6.2.1 Quantity and Quality Dilemma of Public Service

It was highlighted in the previous section that some front-line employees expressed dissatisfaction with the performance measurement system which was based on quantitative targets rather than qualitative ones. This section considers the performance control system in more detail by examining how the front-line personnel addressed challenges to meet both quantity and quality characteristics of public services. It is useful to suggest the characteristics of service quantity and quality dimensions (see Table 10) that lie at the polarities to understand more fully challenges faced by the personnel in meeting strict quantitative performance targets and, yet, attempting to customise service around citizens' needs.

Table 10: Ideal Characteristics of Quantity and Quality

Quantity	Quality
Simple customer interaction	Complex customer interaction
Routinisation	Individualisation/customisation
Strict procedures adherence	Flexible
Tight service-delivery times	Relaxed service-delivery times
Tight time standards	Customer satisfaction a priority
Statistics driven	Statistics modified by quality criteria
Task cycle time short	Task cycle time long
High service volumes	Low service volumes
Low value of service	High value of service
Low level of discretion	High level of discretion
Nature of service - simple	Nature of service – complex
Mass service delivery	Customisation

Adopted and revised from Taylor, Mulvey, Hyman and Bain, 2002

As Table 10 illustrates, at one extreme are simple, straightforward services which require standard employees' actions and responses to customer requests, and which may well be written (for example, applying for a passport). These services are invariably subject to tight service-handling times and control mechanisms based on strict statistical criteria. At the other extreme are services where the nature of customer interaction is more complex, and staff respond more flexibly (for example, application for social and health care benefits). Service times are more relaxed, and while temporal measurements might still apply, other criteria, emphasising the quality of service to the customer, are given higher priority. Consequently, each workflow can be characterised by the relative importance of these quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

Several points require emphasis regarding the relevance of quantity and quality dimensions to the service integration process. This list of characteristics is presented to indicate general contrasts that exist in the public service complexity. Service

delivery within the OSS environment operates at both polarities. However, the research findings suggest that quantitative measurement dominates in the single-window centres undermining qualitative assessment and, as a consequence, reducing customisation of the service. The OSS is a closely monitored system where each party (managers of the MJ and OSS, front-office and back-office staff) are working towards their own statistics rather than the overall better quality of service. Furthermore, the research findings reveal that the employees' perceptions of service quality collide with quantity traditions of bureaucracy, which tend to locate public service operations according quantity dimensions rather than combination of quantity and quality characteristics. An important part in performance evaluation is missing such as tacit skills and interpretative knowledge of the front-line employees as well as customer satisfaction and organisational development.

The penetration of ICT "further into the customer interface", the extensive monitoring of employees' actions, the simplification of query/response screen menu in the OSS computer system and the constant supervisory surveillance defined frontiers of managerial control in the OSS, in which the statistical measurement of performance was combined in various ways with subjective evaluations of employees' behaviour and facial expressions. A regular agenda issue during staff meetings was how to improve "quality", which related to reducing the number of errors in accepting applications from customers, providing updated information on legislation, reducing length of service etc. "Quality" discussions led to an increasing standardisation and routinisation of the front-line work tasks. A typical directive relating to the application review within the protocol of staff meeting reads:

Contact telephone number of the customer must be written at the end of the application. Copies of documents must be verified with originals.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the operators used a specially designed computer system, which provided information on service requirements, standards and legislation. Over time, the operators learnt to work rarely using this system as they managed to keep information in their memory. Not surprisingly, given the

pattern of routinisation, the work was experienced as monotonous. A range of responses from the front-line employees demonstrates this:

The work is routine, every day is the same day.

There is a lack of creativity, we have a ready list of answers to all possible questions.

It is a rather technical job, you are not expected to show your intellectual abilities.

One supervisor acknowledged the high degree of routinisation in the work by noting that “repetitive work may cause a decrease of attention to details”. The monotonous and repetitious nature of the work often led to staff towards the end of the day repeating questions absent-mindedly and mixing-up information. This highlights a problem for the front-line staff in really hearing and meeting customer needs.

Both the front-line jobs, “consultant” and “operator”, involved customer service interaction, but differed in the extent of interaction and level of responsibility. As was described in the introductory chapter, the consultants provided information on the service procedures and helped clients in filling in application forms. Normally, customers sat next to the consultants, talked about their problems seeking advice. Important observation was that the consultants were not monitored according to the quantitative targets, such as speed of service and number of clients, which enabled them to deliver a more personalised service. By contrast, being aware of the limited time allowed for each client and aiming at a high number of customers for better performance reports, the operators were under constant pressure to provide fast, rather than high-value, service. The work tasks of the consultants and operators also differed in the level of responsibility. The operator could correct a mistake done by the consultant by returning an incorrect application, whereas an error made by the operator would result in the refusal of processing application by the back-office staff in the stakeholder departments. Although both the consultants and operators were at the front-line of customer service and, at first sight, conducted similar job functions, the consultants were able to deliver more a personalised service and have a more complex nature of interaction with clients, within more relaxed and longer service-delivery time compared to the operators. The operators, being trapped within tight

service-delivery times, routinised task cycle, low discretion, and driven by statistics, had more straightforward customer interaction (accepting or rejecting an application) and delivered mass and non-personalised public services.

When asked to reflect on the quality of service that the OSS provided, there turned out to be a striking difference between the managers and staff. While the managers were generally positive about the service quality and work progress, many employees were critical of their services. As the following quotes illustrate, the mutual commitment of the front-line staff has probably developed through practice and burnout:

Some clients like elderly people need special treatment. On the one hand, to meet time standard I need to give a rapid service, on the other hand, from an ethical viewpoint I need to spend more time with the client by talking about how they feel, what they need and how we can help them.

There are contradictions in our performance measurement. Who provides measurement – citizens who are not always happy with the service when you are trying to help them and managers who tell you to speed up the service.

They say that we need to be customer-orientated and this is self-rewarding to help people, but I would be much more satisfied if we had a better salary.

The managers were well aware of the difficult labour exercised by the staff as illustrated in the following quote:

To be honest there is a contradiction between service quality and availability of staff. This could be easily solved if we recruit more staff, but we can't because of the limited budget. So we are left with the current system, and despite all the criticism, the system works, clients and government bodies have become used to one stop shops.

This section reviewed quantity and quality characteristics of the public service which makes the work of the front-line customer service even more challenging and contradictory. In many ways the OSS became victims of the ambitions of the MJ. The pressure to match political promises in terms of cost and time saving capacity, and the growing market, trapped the single-window centres in a cycle of short-term thinking about results. The following discussion examines the ways that the

utilisation of technologies in the single-window centres aimed at strengthening centralised control.

6.2.2 Use of Technologies in Strengthening Control

The great advantage of service integration policy was partly due to the extensive use of new technologies and innovations. Different types of technologies adopted in the OSS aimed at service improvement and reducing the level of corruption, the ways they were utilised and the views of both managers and employees are considered in this section. The single-window centres across regions were connected to the corporate network via the Internet with the main system located in the MJ, a technological advantage not yet adopted in the majority of the traditional departments. The OSS managers used electronic means to send statistical performance reports and financial reports to the MJ. As was illustrated earlier in this chapter, the use of ICT enabled operators to speed-up the process of property registration through the integration of the databases among the OSS and Property Centre. With the political support of the MJ and technological support from the IT department and AIC, the OSS actively adopted new technologies and, therefore, were able to process applications from citizens and businesses more quickly than in the earlier practice.

During this research project both case organisations were introducing a pilot coding system that attributed individual numbers to each application, which contained digital information on the type of service and deadline of service provision. The digital information was included in the electronic network system, called “Interactive Map of Documents Flow in the OSS”, which enabled operators to track the progress of application review in the OSS and stakeholder departments and get updated information on each document in terms of its current physical location (either in the front-office or back-office) and status of review (under review, rejected, or ready for issue). The link to the “Interactive Map of Documents Flow in the OSS” on the website of the MJ that would enable clients to monitor the progress of their application online was still under construction by the end of this research project. For this

reason, I was not able to describe the use of this system in practice from a customer's perspective.

The OSS introduced a number of informational services using technological means. The customers received a confirmation notice through SMS-messaging, automated calls to the fixed-line phones or by e-mail according to their preferences made. Remote regions in Kazakhstan still have limited access to fixed-line communication, whereas mobile penetration in the country has reached the 100% mark and is constantly growing (Nuttall, 2009). Thus, the use of mobile technology has the potential of making public services more accessible for customers. In response to the public critique about limited access to the information, a pilot call-centre was introduced in the case study organisations in autumn 2008, with a vision to transfer their experience across regions at a later stage of policy development.

The OSS were among the first public organisations to use an electronic signature to send official documents and authenticate them, an innovation that was later extended to other public services. It was envisaged that the corporate network of the OSS would integrate sectoral databases, particularly registration of citizens and registration of businesses. It was widely reported in the mass media that electronic information kiosks were introduced in Astana in autumn 2008 to deliver selected pilot services (for example, residence registration) in electronic format. However, during my last visit to the case study organisations in December 2009 information kiosks still did not work due to the technical problems.

Another innovation to facilitate service integration was the recent adoption of the Law on the National Register and Identity Code. In the traditional practice the government bodies used their own numbers to identify citizens and entrepreneurs: tax bodies used registration tax numbers, labour departments - social identity codes, justice departments – identification codes etc. Sharing information about clients was constrained with different systems of customer identification used by the public sector organisations. In order to facilitate information exchange and integration of databases, a unified identity code was attributed to identify citizens and

entrepreneurs for several sectors. For example, the MJ, OSS and ALRM planned to combine electronic databases of land and property in order to reach maximum transparency in the issues of land distribution and the simplification of land registration. This database was expected to feature over three million land and property owners.

The team of IT experts within the MJ played a significant role in promoting technological changes within the service integration policy framework. Talented, bright experts, aged 23-30, were recruited from business companies, banks and universities, and encouraged to transfer innovations from the business to the public sector. Young specialists were attracted to the MJ by the fact that they could initiate and implement innovations in practice, thus, developing their practical knowledge and skills. One IT manager explained the reasons for leaving the business sector with higher salaries and taking the job at the MJ in the following way:

After graduation from the university I participated in the project on the introduction of the smart-card and call-centre technologies in the KazKommertsBank for two years which received several awards by Global Finance and Euromoney. Then, I was invited to the Ministry by my former colleague from the bank who became manager of the IT group there. It is fascinating to implement new methods of service delivery, and to see the impact on the speed of service. Our style of work here is very similar to that in the business sector as we work in small teams on products and services.

Another respondent from IT department of the MJ pointed out that new technologies were not implemented in other government bodies to the extent that they were utilised within the OSS context.

Zuboff (1988) described the use of ICT to record and locate the organisation's activities as the textualisation of the organisation. She was optimistic that this would manifest as a site for learning rather than a behavioural control device, in her words, "informating" rather than automating. Textualisation happened on two levels in the OSS. First, processes were streamlined by the simultaneous creation of electronic records on staff performance. Second, client – staff interactions were recorded on video cameras. The electronic and video records on staff performance were

transferred online to the electronic system “Situational Centre” located in the central office of the MJ. The Situational Centre enabled the senior management of the MJ to get access to the updated information on service performance from the OSS in terms of the number of documents (accepted, rejected and delayed) and the average speed of service etc. Availability of the statistical data provided the opportunity to make comparisons among the single-window centres in quantitative terms. Moreover, this system enabled the observation of video recordings of customer service interactions. For example, by navigating on a selected picture on the screen, which showed several OSS in different regions at one time, the managers at the MJ were able to select and enlarge a picture, change areas of observation within selected OSS (customer service area or manager’s office) and listen to the recorded conversations of people. In this way personnel were located in a cycle of accountability which aimed to increase reliability, performance accuracy and reduce risks of corruption.

The managers and front-line staff had contrasting views on the use of video recording in the workplace. The managers emphasised positive sides of using video recording to help in dealing with clients’ complaints and reduce corruption. As the managers commented on the use of video technology in the workplace setting:

If a customer complains about impolite and rude behaviour of my employee, we would invite HR manager, customer and front-line worker to view the recording and discuss the situation. Clients don’t know that their interactions with staff are recorded and often we can see on the screen that it was a customer who provoked the conflict situation. However, if our staff member was impolite, we would impose a disciplinary penalty and cut their bonus.

Video recording helps to reduce bribe-seeking behaviour because employees know that their actions and conversations are recorded.

However, video recording was perceived by the staff in both case study organisations as “unfair”, “breaking their human rights” due to the constant moral pressure and additional stress which led to shared resentment.

We are under someone’s eye all the time, this distracts from our work. Most of my colleagues are honest people, and those few who take bribes, can continue their practice outside the office. Did they [managers] really think that video recording would combat corruption?!!

This is unfair towards us to monitor our behaviour and interactions all the time:
you can't relax, you should always have to think about your words.

These comments illustrate how the front-line staff who found themselves under similar pressures, have learnt the contradictions, realised the organisational limits, and turned to their colleagues for support. Both the management and staff were aware of the fact that they were being observed, however, the customers did not know about this, thus, the use of this system raises serious ethical issues related to informed consent and data protection. Whether explicit or not, a threat was embedded for the front-line employees where each of them was constructed as an object of suspicion to be observed and monitored. The utilisation of video recording could be constructed positively, however, its use within OSS context as a control device implied a low trust regime and suggested a culture of defensiveness – “an organisation at war with itself.”

Statistical performance data and video recording of the service interactions that was available through technological means strengthened power authorities of the MJ. In the previous practice the central government had to rely on the subjective reports of the public service organisations about their performance and was not able to verify information given the lack of electronic records. Now the government could have access through the Situational Centre to the information on the OSS and stakeholders' performance, thus, promoting a myth of “perfect information” and total control. In fact, the research findings demonstrate that control was far from total. This research project provides much evidence of employees' strategies to resist the prescribed routine. For example, the operators tried to keep service length short in order to satisfy tight time standard and risked leaving clients' problems unsolved, resulting in customers having to come again and again. This behaviour brings into question the “totalness of control”. Many examples of public complaints were observed in the case study organisations as a response to such behaviour. Thus, while monitoring is framed as a developmental activity, it also takes the form of an organisational defence routine (Argyris and Schon, 1978a).

One of the goals of service integration policy was making public service more orientated to the customers' needs and expectations. Sturdy (1998) reports employee frustration when systems force them to work against customers' interests. As the ICT infrastructure set the context and content of what can and cannot be done in the OSS, the front-line employees were frequently prevented from responding to non-routine needs, and providing efficient and individualised customer service. Causes for customers' complaints were often justified driven largely by an inflexible system of strict hierarchy that was unable to cope with exceptions without agreement by the senior management. Inevitably, the front-line workers absorbed and smoothed the resulting customer frustrations. Behind the "veil" of efficiency and control, there was a black hole. The personnel were not given the scope to use their discretion to solve problems following the traditional bureaucratic pattern. Despite intentions of customer orientation, this reflects inherent system brittleness and core rigidity. As one operator commented:

The fact that I can't do anything to help the customer, makes me feel bad, I feel incompetent, though I am not [...] The top-managers in the Ministry have big ideas, but they are too distant from reality [...] They don't understand how it should be done [...]

From the management perspective, the monitoring of performance was constructed as a supportive and developmental process. At the local level it was often with supervisors working with employees to improve their statistics from the point of view of personal gains in terms of appraisal grades. However, the dual function was close to the surface. The senior management at the MJ was increasingly distanced from the lessons of the bottom level, with the presence of OSS managers and supervisors, as buffers absorbing problems, and tight control systems which inhibited reflection. The simulated reality was far from the accuracy, reliability and completeness attributed to it.

The OSS was a closely monitored system, and managers were always looking at, checking reports and analysing performance. This raises issues of what they were looking at. Were they counting the countable, rather than what needed to be understood? Statistical data could be taken from computer systems on any

measurable aspects of activity, giving the impression of complete control. The main focus was on measurable outcomes: speed of service, number of services provided etc. Additionally measured were factors such as personnel turnover rates, time off the front desk. But how did these figures explain the reasons behind these issues? The managers in the MJ were distanced from the front-line reality and relied on the virtual lenses of statistics. This meant that much information was being absorbed and hidden. Furthermore, measurement suffered from being retrospective and inward looking. As one operator put it:

[...] so poor quality results come and they want us to improve quality again, and the next month they're going to talk about long length of service and complaining customers, and the quality is gone again. I think instead of telling us about the wrong things done in the past month, we should be more proactive of what could be improved next month [...] It's our managers and we, staff, who suffer [...]

A common theme in the responses of the staff members concerned the OSS' inability to provide a safety net for developing professionalism. This realisation was expressed by the front-line employees through two main aspects:

1. the failure of managers to provide practical solutions to the contradictions that staff experienced; and
2. the failure of organisational technologies to support the goals of the organisation.

This two-fold disillusion is captured in the following quote by the employee:

You know what we are doing? We look at the computer system which tells us what documents are needed for this particular service, we accept the application and send it to the chancellery, that's all. It's quite a technical work where you don't develop professional skills. I don't know why but we can't use e-mail in communication with colleagues from other OSS, MJ and government bodies.

An important part in realising the organisational limits was the accumulative impact of technological deficiencies as perceived by the staff. Many respondents mentioned the computer software specially designed for the single-window centres in order to illustrate this issue. The directory was originally developed as a constantly updated online manual of service descriptions, checklist of documents for submission,

standards and regulations, service flowcharts and tariffs. Moreover, it was envisaged that the OSS computer system would deliver e-learning opportunities for staff members irrespective of their location in the country. In that sense the directory represented an attempt to formalise, standardise and stimulate organisational learning. However, the staff expressed concerns that the OSS computer system was too mechanistic and technical. In fact, it was not updated regularly following recent legal amendments. Given the shortage of funding the MJ decided that this system would be installed in the office computers at the OSS rather than being accessible online for a temporary period of time. As one employee said:

For simple and frequent services you don't use the database because you remember the checklist of documents by heart, so why bother searching on the screen which takes time. In the case of complex services, like property registration, you would check with the computer system. [...] The legal database is outdated, and if we can't find the required legislation, we would ask senior colleagues.

Thus, when facing difficult issues the front-line staff relied on social networks by seeking advice from more experienced colleagues. The coaching method of work was actively used to transfer knowledge from the "veterans" to the new recruits. The operators summarised it in the following way:

[...] It would be more useful if we had opportunity to ask questions, for example, by e-mail from our colleagues in the government bodies. But we have no communication with them so we rely on the database content, personal experience and advice from senior colleagues. [...]

The views of the managers regarding Internet access for staff were different. The "traditional managers" did not support this as they were concerned that Internet would distract the employees from work and have negative impact on the overall performance of the organisation. The "technological managers" were enthusiastic about opening new opportunities for staff related to Internet access in terms of improving communication among colleagues from other single-window centres and stakeholder departments.

This section illustrated that in the OSS context the culture of control intensified down through organisational levels, based on institutionalised self-protection and defensive behaviour. Although new technologies and innovations have improved the speed of some services, they have also strengthened centralised control and power over OSS in the coordinating authority. The overriding focus in the performance control system was on quantitative goals. The easiest things to measure and quantify had been selected that were overt and obvious – surface behaviours and skills. However, the important parts were missing, such as tacit skills and the interpretative knowledge of the front-line staff. In assessing overall performance, the OSS used only statistics without measuring customer satisfaction and organisational development. The operators worked without any qualitative feedback beyond being able to check their statistics. The measurement philosophy was based on the reductionism that only what could be measured could be done, which ignored many crucial things beyond measurement. The next section continues the discussion of the managerial practices in the single-window centres by focusing on the physical environment as a means of control.

6.2.3 Physical Environment as a Means of Visual Surveillance

Modern and business-like office facilities have the potential to encourage employee accommodation in the labour process. However, the research findings from both case study sites suggested that office design was capable of promoting individual and collective resistance. Despite the better physical environment of the OSS offices compared to those at the traditional departments, the personnel seemed to attribute a lack of productivity to inadequate working conditions.

Management could take into account our needs. If they would give us a more comfortable environment, we will be able to work more effectively, but we have little chance[...] At my previous jobs I always had my own desk and phone calls, and things like that, and I was able to move freely without being watched.

This comment also illustrates how the physical environment may be utilised to give tangible expressions for a desire for greater control over the work process (“my own desk and phone calls”).

After the Soviet Union collapse, many public buildings were privatised and used for commercial purposes. One such building, a three-storied former nursery was bought from the business company and renovated specially for the OSS-1. In the case of OSS-2 it was based in the new, modern building. As was described in the introductory chapter, both offices were located in the densely populated parts of the city, had open-plan design and decorated in a blue colour. At both sites the employees had no control over lighting, heating and air-conditioning. Overall, the office design and furniture were similar in both case study organisations.

Over time buildings come to represent their organisations and have the effect of helping people construct what they think and feel about the organisation (Hatch, 1997: 253). The evidence from the case study sites suggests that overcrowded buildings, especially at the early stage of policy implementation, contributed to staff discontent. The management were aware of physical environment issues. The manager of OSS-1 explained the importance of physical environment facilities:

When we opened, a team from the Ministry came to design office according to the uniform standards so that OSS would be recognised by the customers across the country. They made a really good office!

The above quote was confirmed by the statement of his colleague from the OSS-2:

We wanted our customers to see that the government has really improved conditions for service provision. There is a huge difference between the past experience of getting service in a government department and now when you enter bright, modern and clean buildings, now our clients feel respected. A nice environment also makes our staff feel happy.

The management's claim that "a nice environment makes staff feel happy" was only partially confirmed by the employees. All staff interviewed liked the modern physical conditions of the workplace, however, there were several critical comments regarding the environment:

We don't have our own space, desks, we have to share everything with colleagues from the next shift, which is inconvenient.

It's cold during winter because of the lack of heating. Some days we have to wear warm jumpers on the uniform. It's hot during summer due to the poor airconditioning [...] And we don't have enough toilets [...] one for staff and one for clients, that's not enough. [...] We have no room to sit and talk during breaks, have a cup of tea and relax.

Hot-desking or, in management speak, “non-territorial offices” refers to an employee working from whatever desk is available. The practice offers employers a flexible landscape with a number of advantages: sites can be physically smaller with resultant savings in utilities costs, equipment needs are fewer and capital is in constant use. As the OSS had staff working on two shifts, it was uneconomic to lock up a desk for every employee. The managers believed that hot-desking not only permitted operational flexibility, but also facilitated employer's control. It made it difficult for the staff to work consistently with the same group of people. However, the employees were preoccupied with the personal implications of not having an individualised workspace that they could personalise, particularly among female staff.

As the employees changed desks constantly, it was impossible for them to decorate their workstations with personal items such as photographs thereby demonstrating “ownership” of a particular space. Implicit in comments about the lack of a staff common room was an attitude of hidden resistance to managerial control. The personnel perceived management to be attempting to make them work harder by removing all distractions or assuming that their work effort would decline if they were provided with a common room. “It's a pity that we can't meet informally within the office”, said one operator, who added that although she would not go there when she was busy, it would occasionally be nice to chat with colleagues in a relaxed environment.

When commenting on the discontent at the OSS, another employee said:

OSS has a nice modern building, it attracts people. As you start to work here, you realise that some of the gloss is just appearance.

This comment points to the potential of even a “nice, modern” environment to promote dissatisfaction. External appearances may give rise to the expectation that the work itself will be equally pleasant. Both case study organisations consist of large, open-plan rooms with desks arranged along the front-line. The separated spaces were offices for the management and administrative staff. The managers enjoyed the luxury of a private space, another indicator of power and authority. The open-plan layout of the offices was not designed with a view to assisting staff communication. As one of the managers put it:

It's a big area with a lot of people, but it's not the sort of job where you can talk to the colleague beside you if you are serving a client.

However, the staff managed to talk with each other while they were waiting for the next customer and during short breaks. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, the consultants had more flexibility to talk as their performance was not timed and strictly monitored as the operators' performance. The open-plan environment enabled the supervisors to see what the front-line employees were doing at all times: who was serving a customer, who was talking with a colleague. The open-planning removed the closed or private spaces in which staff could hide or talk privately. During lunch time the staff usually went to the nearest café where they enjoyed freedom of talk. The supervisors were often too busy to see everything that went on, even if they wished to. Moreover, the supervisors could themselves be seen at all times. One supervisor remarked that all supervisors managed in slightly different ways. She went on to say that sometimes it was easier to ignore problems:

I can tell the staff if something was wrong with serving a customer, but when it comes to communication among colleagues [...] It's hard to make a comment, we all want to talk. I suppose the staff are looking at me and thinking “What is she doing?”[...] everybody is watching everybody.

In the OSS-2 separate offices were allocated to the supervisors so they could discuss some issues in private with staff and avoid constant observation and being observed. However, the supervisor had a view that their constant presence signalled that employees were being monitored, and that management was approachable. For example, if a client raised concerns about the correctness of the application

registration, his/her complaint was immediately passed onto a supervisor. However, the supervisor's comment that openness facilitated the ability of staff to approach management should be assessed in the context of her subsequent observation that "if you want to talk with someone about why they are late for work, you can just walk to the next desk and do it." However, a supervisor's visibility had two sides. The front-line staff believed that supervisor's presence in the open-plan office provided opportunities and legitimacy for them to query management decisions. Thus, there was a blurring between resistance and accommodation.

A desire to inhibit collective organisation appeared to influence the layout of the OSS. There was no space for staff to meet privately. Research by others (for example, Hatch: 1997) has suggested that the lack of private workspace impedes the ability of workers to discuss common concerns and thereby hinders collective organisation. Lack of space and privacy may hinder collective organisation but may also generate solidarity. The staff could see their colleagues performing the same tasks under the same conditions, and were able to see when colleagues were upset. The interaction between the staff and the clients was to some extent common property: the employees could see and hear what was occurring and that gave rise to a strong sense of community. Some employees had known each other before recruitment at the OSS: they might have worked together in the same organisation. For example, one operator explained that she came to the OSS because her manager got a job here and invited her. In this instance, community ties had provided the precondition for workers to join together.

This section explored perceptions of the managers and employees of the physical environment and its impact on the nature of interactions between managers, supervisors and staff as well as amongst employees. The evidence from the case study organisations suggests that, despite the modern and business-like physical environment created in the single-window centres, it was capable of promoting individual and collective resistance. Dissimilarities in the managerial staff and employees' responses to the built environment in both sites were not always attributable to the physical differences. The diverse reactions to the built

environment indicated the importance to the front-line staff of a sense of control over their environment, whether it was for reasons of comfort, health, fairness, equity, or personal space. It would seem that employees' perceptions of autonomy and dignity exerted a significant influence in shaping struggles over the built environment. The open-plan design of the OSS facilitated surveillance by removing private spaces in which resistance might develop. The managers saw in hot-desking a means not only of maximising return on investment but also of breaking down worker discontent. Although the lack of a common room and private workspace made it difficult for the staff to discuss common concerns and thereby hindered collective organisation, these factors served to generate solidarity because the employees could see that their discontentment was shared by their colleagues.

Unlike customer service or statistical monitoring, which might call into question an individual's abilities, the front-line employees were unlikely to be held accountable for the shortcomings of the physical environment in which they worked. While they might accommodate to indispensable elements of customer service work such as repetition and monotony, they were less likely to accept shortcomings in their physical surroundings. It was difficult for the managerial staff to rationalise away a desk or chair that was inconvenient. Struggles that focused on the built environment may be a reflection of broader, less tangible conflicts. The advantage of the physical environment as an arena for resistance lay in its visibility and measurability.

6.3 SUMMARY

This chapter considered several important issues. First, power dimensions within the OSS policy context were analysed by exploring the nature of the relationships among three groups of actors: 1) management staff from the MJ, OSS and stakeholder departments; 2) OSS managers and front-line employees; and 3) front-office and back-office personnel. In particular, this chapter analysed how the relationships between the traditional bureaucrats and customer-oriented bureaucracy transformed from initial resistance towards cooperation on the design and delivery of joined-up services. Secondly, this chapter examined the control system and managerial

practices adopted within the single-window centres with particular emphasis on the use of technologies and physical environment as a means of control. It discussed the contradictory dilemma of quantitative and qualitative aspects of public services faced by the front-line personnel.

The research findings suggest that the OSS followed the pattern of hierarchy and centralised control by transferring the culture from the traditional bureaucracy into a new public sector organisation. Although formally the single-window centres received high-level political support, their own budgets, personnel and authorities to manage joined-up service provision, in practice they played the role of the ministerial branches following to the strict directives of the central management. The OSS managers were not expected to initiate changes in service delivery or build partnerships with the new service providers unless the MJ provided agreement.

Whilst the technology is increasingly “fit for purpose” at the single-window centres, the research evidence indicated that success or failure of the service integration policy was less a technological issue and more a people issue - in particular, the ability of the government to change traditional working practices and overcome bureaucracy. Both case study organisations represented highly routinised workflows where the front-line employees exercised very little control over key aspects of task performance. These workflows approximated very closely to the ideal characteristics of “quantity” outlined in Table 10. Targets, whether explicit or normative, were applied, and sustained efforts were made to measure employees’ output and performance including managerial initiatives aimed at assessing the quality of customer service interaction. This last point is important as some writers assume that the management’s ability to measure service workers’ outputs is limited especially “insofar as service work encompasses aspects of quality in addition to productivity” (Frenkel et al., 1999: 139). In the case of OSS quantitative rather than qualitative criteria were employed in the evaluation of customer service interactions. The majority of the employees expressed a general lack of control over key aspects of their job, perceiving task performance to be highly routinised. In other words, the degree of “customisation” was limited and highly constrained by the managerial

imperatives. In both case study organisations major initiatives from the central ministry to intensify monitoring and introduce tight targets were introduced. Rather than moving towards greater customisation, the OSS prioritised the imperative of cost minimisation and greater centralised control. The consequences involved the further growth of routinisation and intensification, although it was possible that a minority of the staff might enjoy higher levels of discretion and creative responsibility.

The OSS were rooted in contradictory tensions and structural paradoxes, and confronted a number of trade-offs on that basis. These set a context for attitudes towards the organisation and could impose conflicting role requirements on the front-line jobs. A core example was that of the pressure for quantity versus the aspiration for quality, the guiding logic of which was trying to get closer to the customer while routinising, centralising, reducing costs and prescribing standards. As an OSS manager put it:

You can have all the quality and communication skills, but what good it is, if the customer from remote villages can't get access to staff?

This was a common issue for the OSS which by their very presence stimulated service volume. As the employees were measured on the number of clients and services provided, the pressure to push through services was passed down the system. As the customer queues built, the “service waiting time” indicators increased, and the personnel were aware that clients would be frustrated when they finally did get through, a factor that served to reduce service quality.

The Kazakhstani system has a centralised nature and its control occurs on an administrative basis, where performance measures are regarded both as a threat and interference in administration as well as colliding with paternalistic and personalistic values. The selection and adoption of technologies like “Situational Centre” which enabled them to monitor statistical performance and record service interactions, behaviour and conversations of the managers and front-line personnel illustrates an

example of how the bureaucratic machine managed to strengthen centralised control and impose a threat over the OSS staff across the regions.

Concepts of clear targets, performance indicators and responsibility through performance mechanisms collide with a culture that is strongly influenced by legal control and the traditional administrative procedures. The OSS operated without clear performance measures or established targets. Thus, the link between resources and results, which is a central element of NPM reform, has limited impact in the Kazakhstani case. The OSS have not borrowed these features from NPM. The OSS managers were not “free to manage” within their own spheres of responsibilities, but under discretionary control from the senior officials of the MJ who could intervene in almost all areas of service management.

Although customer service organisations have attracted considerable academic attention, one aspect has been largely ignored: the role of the physical environment both in enabling managerial control and its utilisation by employees to resist and accommodate that control. In the context of the Kazakhstani single-window centres the built environment was not a neutral space but, like working hours and wages, was “contested terrain”. The contest was not confined solely to the work processes that took place within the OSS, but extended to the physical attributes of the workspace itself. This research has examined how the design of the OSS not only facilitated managerial control but also generated employee resistance and accommodation. Although the employees might find the repetitive and stressful nature of service work of greater concern than the built environment, the tangibility of the physical workspace made it a focus of resistance. Whereas the staff might be held responsible for work performance deficiencies, the managers could not blame them for deficiencies in the physical environment without also rendering themselves liable to criticism. Therefore, the front-line staff might displace dissatisfaction with working conditions into the built environment because it provided a safer, less contestable ground than resistance to other forms of control. This chapter has examined how the physical environment (the building, layout, furniture, equipment, design) and the ambient environment (lighting, temperature), while promoting managerial control,

also provoked resistance and accommodation in the workforce. It has suggested that the employees might deliberately exploit concerns about the environment as a tool to resist control. The following chapter presents an analysis of the personnel policies in the single-window centres with particular emphasis on selection, recruitment and training policies as well as gendered divisions among the staff.

7. PERSONNEL POLICY: TENSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

This chapter examines the development of the “communities of practice” (CoP) among the front-line employees for a better understanding of the challenges faced in the process of service integration. Organisational culture of the case study organisations is viewed in this work as based on two different categories, which are not necessarily integrative: managerial culture and workplace culture (Raz, 2002). The first category, managerial culture, designates the perceptions of the OSS managers and its top-down messages, systems and norms. The second category, workplace culture, encompasses the everyday practices of organisational life as seen from the staff members’ points of view. The evidence from case study organisations suggests that the workplace culture provides room for the front-line employees’ subversion of managerial control. The development of CoPs is considered against the background of personnel management practices, cultural contradictions and emotional labour performed by the front-line staff. This chapter starts with analysis of personnel management policies: selection, recruitment and training. It then explores the role of gendered divisions among the staff in the formation of social competencies required for intensive customer service.

7.1 SKILLS REQUIRED FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

This section considers the recruitment policies within the single-window centres with particular focus on the processes of selection and recruitment of the front-line employees. The processes of selection and recruitment for managerial and front-line positions followed different approaches. As was mentioned in Chapters 4 and 6, most OSS managers had worked in the local departments of justice before, and had professional and personal connections with the political management of the MJ. In the corrupt culture of the Kazakhstani public sector the position of the OSS manager was attractive for many government officials given the opportunity it presented to get access to illegal payments from customers as well as career prospects. There was no

open advertising for managerial jobs: information on vacancies was passed through “word of mouth” among government officials. Candidate’s selection for a managerial post at the OSS depended on the authority and status of the person who recommended him or her and/or the amount of payment to get this position. There were a series of publications in local mass media about the resistance of the front-line staff to the appointment of young university graduates to the managerial jobs at the OSS who lacked necessary knowledge, experience and professionalism (Akhmetova, 2007). Another example is a former manager of the OSS in Astana, a 26 year old, who within three years had had rapid career development, from the role of postal courier to adviser to the General Secretary of the MJ, and then to the managerial position at the OSS, due to his close relations with the General Secretary. Under the pressure of critical mass media publications and an investigation by the Financial Police, which revealed his relation to the illegal transfer of funds to foreign banks, this manager was rotated to the position of the Head for Control and Monitoring Department within the MJ.

The senior managers of the MJ were powerful figures since they could have access to the distribution of tangibles – jobs, contracts, tenders – and, through development of these resources could build and maintain their personal clientele. In principle, the greater the resources controlled, the more powerful the patron (Cummings, 2005). In the OSS context the key patron was the former Minister of Justice, Mrs. Zagipa Baliyeva, who promoted staff members to the managerial positions of the OSS, in some cases based on their qualification and experience, in other cases based on the family relations, nepotism and corruption. During this research project, I met several OSS managers with many years of experience in the public sector, excellent communication and management skills, who were enthusiastic about service quality initiatives. However, in order to become the OSS managers they had to get support from the political management of the MJ. Hence, reliance on informal power and relations through mutual obligation personalised the regime and placed patronage and nepotism at the centre of OSS recruitment policy for management positions. By contrast, the selection process for low-rank, front-line jobs was transparent and skill-

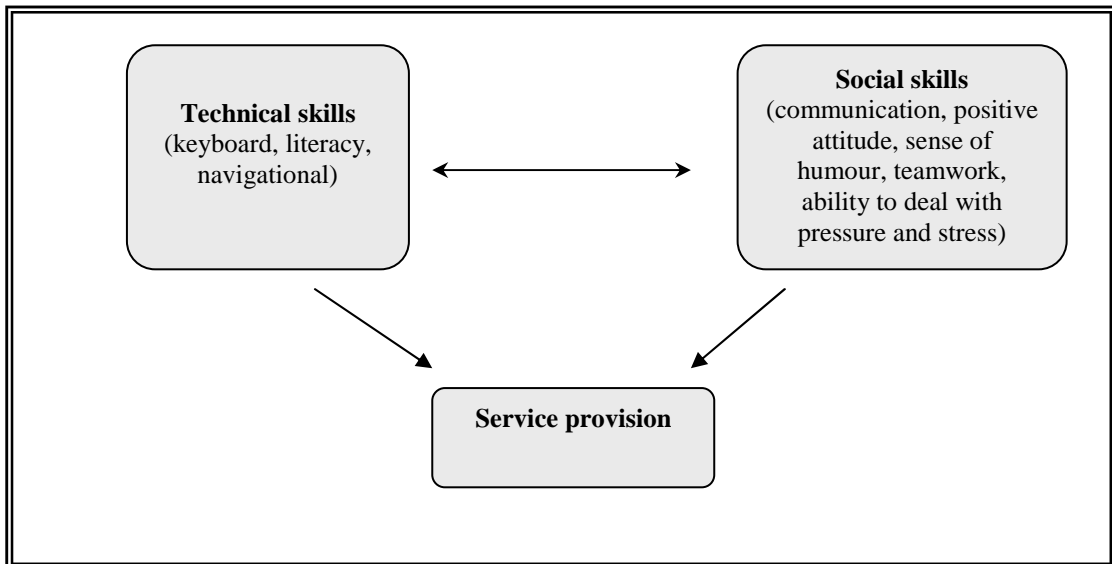
based. The selection process for front-office positions consisted of the following stages:

- job specification designed;
- appropriate recruitment channel selected;
- application forms collected;
- interviews conducted, and, finally,
- job offers made.

The key focus of recruitment, from the view of the managers, was to find the “right fit” of employees for such a “high stress” environment. Advertising for front-line jobs was performed through daily newspapers, job fairs for unemployed people and university graduates. Geary’s (1994) notion of the young worker is a depiction of a typical front-line employee, who is in her or his early 20s and likely to be a graduate, some with postgraduate degrees. There was a disproportionate number of females, who constituted 80 percent of the total number of staff. The front-office employees were considered to be “multi-skilled” as they were expected to provide a large number of services irrespective of the nature of service: legal, land, tax or military registration. The OSS were the first public sector organisation in Kazakhstan which aimed at integrating services traditionally separated by professional and organisational boundaries. The diversity of policies and procedures that flowed from stakeholders meant that it was difficult to identify the existence of one clear set of policies. The development of service standards and regulations on each service was implemented through extensive negotiations and training sessions for front-office and back-office staff. The huge volumes of complex procedures, which led to contradictory interpretations of the policies by the service providers, were adapted into clear, user-friendly and transparent guidelines with information on application requirements, speed of service and service fees. Specially designed computer systems, which contained service standards and regulations, became available from every front-line desk, which contributed to an increasing routinisation of work tasks.

The OSS managers believed that the front-line staff required a particular mix of skills. This was less based on technical abilities (such as computer skills), but more on social competencies that were more difficult to identify, yet crucial to customer service work. As Figure 9 illustrates, the recruitment process was designed to assess applicants in two areas: social and technical skills.

Figure 9: Required Mix of Skills for Front-Line Position



Technical skills included basic computer knowledge, such as keyboard, navigational and computer literacy skills. Social skills were more difficult to define and contained diversity of necessary skills required for a front-line worker in the view of the OSS managers such as communication skills, positive attitude, sense of humour, teamwork and ability to work under pressure and stress. Initially, the managers had a recruitment goal of attracting large number of applicants focusing entirely on technical skills. However, this approach proved to be ineffective, as the managers commented in the interviews.

Initially we didn't pay attention to the personality type of potential employees as long as they had education and were able to work on the computer. But that didn't prove enough. [...] One has to be morally strong to be able to constantly interact with so many people every day and able to work in a team with colleagues. [...] New entrants may not have university degree, college education is enough for this type of job, but if they want to learn and have excellent communication skills, we give jobs to such people.

Many new recruits couldn't cope with the constant psychological pressure to have customer interactions all day. [...] Most clients are ok, but it is hard to provide service to difficult customers: some are aggressive, impolite and rude. You need to be morally strong to work in the OSS. [...]

The staff played a critical role in the management of customer relationships. As a consequence, the managers had gradually paid more attention to intangible qualities within the person, such as an applicant's adaptability, teamwork skills, self-confidence and degree of optimism to the existing organisational culture. There is a growing body of literature that recognises the "person centred" approach to finding the attitude to match the organisation, rather than the skills to match the tasks (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Callaghan and Thompson, 2002). The Kazakhstani OSS represented a middle ground. Finding a person with the attitude and values that matched the organisation's culture was considered important. However, equally as important, was finding a person with a range of skills required to perform adequately in the customer service environment. As Figure 9 shows, these skills included a combination of technical and social skills.

There was no requirement for job applicants to have prior experience of direct customer-contact jobs. A law degree was preferable but not compulsory. The core criteria for a front-line employee selection were social skills, personality characteristics, and specific abilities, such as an ability to be part of a team. The managers were looking for certain personality traits, one of which was a "positive attitude":

It is important to have a positive attitude with people to work here. That means being patient and friendly towards customers, being supportive to colleagues. If someone generally dislikes to communicate with people, we openly say that this job is not for him or her. Either you have positive attitude or not, you can't teach it.

Honestly, I don't pay too much attention to the computer skills of the potential applicant. This is what can be learnt during the work process, on training courses. [...] What is difficult to change is someone's attitudes, values. Front-line employees should not be indifferent towards clients.

Social skills were given priority in the recruitment process. To the management good customer service required a positive attitude and, importantly, this could not be taught, it was a part of someone's personality. In the first quote the manager did not see a "positive attitude" as a learned ability, "you can't teach it", while the second manager was less concerned with technical competencies, where training could be provided, than with possessing the necessary attitude.

Although the managers interviewed were very keen to point out that they did not discriminate when recruiting employees, it was generally acknowledged that women were more likely than men to hold the types of communication skills required in the customer service environment. Indeed, this perception was also shared by most of the staff. Women were seen as better able to handle the interactive aspect of the job. They were generally perceived to be more "lively" and "chatty" with the customers, as well as more highly skilled at building rapport over face-to-face interaction, as two managers explained:

Girls are more lively and keen on talking and it definitely works in this job.

Women by their nature are much more conversational, men are much more to the point, they just want to get the job done.

In addition, women were perceived to be more comfortable with the ethics of customer service, and particularly skilled at listening and empathising with customers. They were also deemed to be more tolerant with the more difficult customers and less likely to react aggressively to difficult customers. It was frequently stated by the participants that these kinds of communication skills came "naturally" to women, as the following quotation by an operator illustrates:

I think women seem to have a lot more patience, we are able to calm down our clients, male staff can also calm down difficult customers, but women seem to do it more and they are more natural at it.

In summary, women were recruited by the managers in part because they were deemed to "naturally" possess the kinds of communication skills required. The managers expected women to perform "emotional labour" over face-to-face

interaction, and they actively used femininity in order to secure this advantage. The front-line employees were required to show observable facial and bodily displays, to empathise with their customers, manage the tone of their voice and control their emotions while servicing potentially difficult customers. Thus, the managers were obliged to find employees who could “micro-self manage” (Wray-Bliss, 2001: 42) a complex mix of skills and competencies including emotional labour. An important observation of this research project was that sustained contact with customers with few opportunities to vary the pace of work and the nature of the tasks often resulted in stress and emotional labour, especially among female workers who were expected to be more tolerant to the offensive behaviour of clients. One manager comments:

The job is hard and some employees can be quite emotional in reacting to the customers' criticisms. [...] Sometimes girls cry [...] especially at the start of their work here, then they get used to it and learn not to pay attention to all of this stuff. I understand them, it's emotionally stressful work.

The other characteristic that emerged in the interviews with the participants was a sense of humour. The prospective applicants were not told that a sense of humour was one of the necessary attitudes; this aspect had arisen during discussions with managers who gave examples of how humour was used by the front-line staff:

There are various types of customers and during work experience the staff learn how to behave and react in different life situations. For example, some customers make jokes and flirt with female workers, in such cases girls do not need to take it seriously. Customers are people and they bring their personalities into the conversations.

This quote shows that not only was it advantageous for employees to possess a sense of humour, it was equally important that they knew when to use this humour. They had to “read” the conversation and decide when it was appropriate to engage in them. Interviews with managers show that quality service was also dependent on the ability to act as a “team player”. This means fitting into the group and demonstrating a willingness to share knowledge and time in problem solving. Thus, the managers emphasised another characteristic, such as an ability to work as part of the team.

We are a small organisation so for us it is important that new employees will be able to join our team, to share team spirit. Ability to work in the team includes willingness to support your colleagues, share your experiences and achieve success together with other members of staff.

The managers relied on the commitment and motivation of their employees, and one way in which the OSS aimed to ensure that they achieved this was through the use of team working strategies. In the OSS context team working did not involve employees working collectively on a range of tasks and sharing decision-making with other group members. Rather, the front-line employees spent the vast majority of their day working in isolation from their colleagues. However, they were grouped into teams on the shift basis, usually of around 15-20 people, and worked towards shared service targets. A strong emphasis was also placed on building a sense of collectivity amongst employees. Many of the employees interviewed commented on the strength of the “team spirit” and the informal culture in their organisations.

When I came here the first thing I noticed was the atmosphere: staff are very supportive of each other which is different from what I’ve been used to in the civil service where people are in strong competition.

Although the OSS were highly controlled working environments, as was described in Chapter 6, the front-line employees did find the time and space to talk to their colleagues both inside and outside of the workplace, as one supervisor explained:

The staff members interact with each other and I suppose it’s partly because they are very young, most of them are 22-27 years old and active.

The responsibility for developing and maintaining the sense of team spirit in the OSS environment was usually held by the supervisors. Indeed, the supervisors interviewed were keen to stress that the main part of their job involved motivating people, and the key way in which this was achieved was by ensuring that all front-line workers were “integrated into the team”. In order to do this they were expected to develop strong personal relations with their team members. It was generally agreed that it was a vital requirement that the supervisors as team leaders possessed strong “team working skills”, particularly the ability to understand, communicate with, motivate, coach and provide support to others, in order to perform their jobs effectively. Only females

were represented in supervisor roles in both case study organisations. The managers and staff felt that women were more likely than men to possess the sort of “team working skills” required for supervisor roles. As the managers explained:

Women have more understanding, more empathy towards people. These are the sorts of skills that you need in the OSS, like coaching and so on.

It’s a natural instinct for women to look after and care for people. Men are more aggressive, individualistic, more likely to make people to do the task rather than encourage them.

Gendered dimensions within the customer service environment are discussed in more detail in the following section. Thus, the combination of positive attitude, humour, ability to work in a team and perform emotional labour were seen by the managers as being crucial to selection of applicants:

I think that communication skills are the most important. [...] The difference between what employees in the government bodies do and what people at the front-line desk do is down to their personality, their communication skills. [...] Why do customers choose to apply for service through OSS rather than directly through government bodies? It’s all about how the staff communicate with that customer. We have to have excellent communication skills.

The priorities of recruitment emerge strongly from this quote. Personality and communication skills were the crucial differentiating qualities. In comparing managerial and employee perceptions, the most consistent themes to emerge from the question, “what kind of skills do you think are necessary to do this job?”, were patience, listening, flexibility and emotional self-management. Therefore, the interviews with the front-line staff revealed some continuity with management on perceptions of skill requirements. In particular, there was common ground that social rather than technical competencies and knowledge were primary. But the emphasis was often different. The personnel were much more likely to associate job requirements with surviving stressful and repetitive work, rather than applying a particular set of personality characteristics to the enthusiastic provision of customer service:

You need to be very, very patient with the customer [...] You may need to repeat what you have just explained for a second, or even third time.

You must remember that the client is always right. You have to take a deep breath, when the customer irritates you. [...] I have been here for six months and it's very stressful.

However, the difference between management and employees might be less than it appeared. The managers were well aware of stressful nature of front-line work and responded to that:

There is little variety in the job: it's one customer after another, all day long, sometimes clients with difficult personalities. [...] The challenge is to treat each customer differently as clients are different. Here the challenge comes. You have to have energy to last the six hour shift. You have to enjoy communicating with clients and have a belief in customer service.

There appears to be a double paradox about the OSS experience of selecting and shaping its labour force. Iles (1999: 20) says that "Work no longer comes in bite sized chunks", yet, work in the OSS was precisely that. Despite the application of matching personality and job characteristics to identify social competencies, the OSS suffered from high levels of labour turnover and high levels of employee dissatisfaction. Both managers of the case organisations in Astana stated that the rates of annual personnel turnover were extremely high, up to 60-70 percent. It is well accepted that customer service employees leave in vast numbers, thus externalising their resistance (Callaghan and Thompson, 2002). It has also been recognised that service organisations often adopt a "sacrificial" policy, whereby they accept high levels of turnover in such high pressure environments (Wallace et al., 2000). It is possible that particular techniques are inappropriate with the results that the wrong employees are being selected. It could be that in low discretion, standardised service interactions, the influence of personality traits on behaviour is likely to be weaker (Mount et al., 1998: 152-153). Regardless of the balance of such explanations, the widespread reporting of high turnover and low morale in the front-line service industry (Callaghan and Thompson, 2002; Wallace et al., 2000), suggests that mis-matching is not the only thing going on.

The second paradox might be concerned with the extent to which social skills, on which the employers placed considerable emphasis when recruiting individuals, were being further developed and enhanced. The nature of work organisation in the OSS context acted to constrain skill development. One of the key aspects of the customer service, acknowledged by both managers and staff, was the predominance of standard, routinised tasks. In fact, the very purpose of establishing single-window centres in the first place was to create an environment in which work could be standardised to create relatively uniform and repetitious activities so as to achieve economies of scale and consistent quality of customer service. As was described in Chapter 6, technologies were adopted within the service integration context to achieve this goal. It has been well documented in the previous research on customer service organisations (see for example, Bain and Taylor, 2000) that in addition to intensifying the workflow, the technologies used in customer service organisations also allow for the extensive surveillance and monitoring of staff. There were remarkable similarities between responses by the employees regarding a narrow range of tasks. The staff talked about the lack of stimulation in their jobs and the “robot” nature of the work, and some identified similarities between the OSS environment and the factory production-line. The restrictive nature of the work was commented on by most employees. The interviewee quoted below, for example, emphasised the lack of opportunity available to demonstrate a broad range of skills due to the routinisation of the work process: “It’s hard to show all of your skills when you only have to accept documents.”

Further, the employees were frustrated because they felt that they possessed the necessary social skills and could not fully use these competencies as the emphasis was placed upon quantitative targets: speed of service and number of applications processed. Giving good quality service and “helping with customers” emerged as key sources of job satisfaction for the personnel, but many felt that the system of work organisation used made it extremely difficult for them to do this. Further, some employees actually doubted whether their managers were in fact interested in delivering good quality services at all:

I think managers are more interested in the statistics. You can't give good service looking only at time targets. This is not what clients want.

However, the managers openly acknowledged that the recruitment and selection processes were not only designed in order to identify people with customer focus, but also to select people with the ability to deal with repetitive and highly pressurised work. The managers admitted that employees were sought for their ability to maintain a "positive attitude" with customers despite the pressures placed on them by the near constant flow of clients and repetitive nature of the work. Nevertheless, there was limited evidence of skill development amongst the staff despite the fact that each of the selected 11 OSS had put considerable investments into training (for more detailed discussion of staff training see section 7.3). Although many interviewees were positive about the transferability of these skills to other work contexts, they were doubtful about whether they had actually developed any new skills whilst working in the OSS environment:

I don't really think that I've picked up many new skills. I just developed a lot on what I have like communication skills.

Whilst the employees had some scope for skill development, the situation appeared to be less positive for managers. It is widely recognised that managers play a pivotal role in the organisation. Nevertheless, the OSS managers stated that no induction management training had been provided for them. This was in spite of the fact that the newly recruited managers lacked experience of managing single-window centres. The intensive nature of the OSS work left them little time to further develop their "people skills" beyond those immediately necessary to carry out their day to day work.

The third paradox might be tensions between how the OSS identified and then used social competencies. The managers appeared not to trust their own judgements about individuals, in that new employees were continually trained to act, both in respect to conformity to service standards and regulations. This contradiction was perceived by staff:

They (managers) are always trying to control us, pushing and pushing. We are not robots, and I am planning to leave soon.

Furthermore, while training emphasised on the *quality* of the service, once in the labour process the focus was on service *quantity*; as one employee said, “all they are worrying about is serving more customers”. In other words, the OSS not only recruited attitude, they shaped and dictated it. For the management an ideal front-line employee was someone who was perceived to be able to act as a person who had substantial resources of “personality” and could draw on and manage these emotions in a systematic way. The personnel were also aware of the need to provide emotional labour:

I manage myself to divide into two personalities: one is for the public, another is for life outside the office. I have two children and I try to switch off the work one when I return home.

I try to look at myself from customer’s point of view: how I behave, look, speak [...] It’s a kind of psychological training.

The research findings consistently revealed that the staff were aware of the need to vary their face, but there was little evidence of deep acting, of employees actually changing themselves. Rather they acted as competent emotion managers and made decisions about their degree of engagement and enthusiasm. Given the pressure of the labour process and the emphasis on service quantity, many employees delivered only surface acting:

I am telling myself: I do this job from 9 in the morning till 3 in the afternoon and that’s it. It’s not a career, it’s a job. I thought that maybe only I have such feelings, but speaking to other people it’s the same.

One part of your mind is doing repetitive work, all over again, another part is far away in your thoughts on life, future job, family.

This “sacrificing” strategy is linked to the prominence that has been shown that the staff place on patience and tolerance in discussion of skills necessary for the job, in contrast to the emphasis of managerial talk on ‘personality’. In low trust conditions, where emotional labour is prescribed and monitored, a response of surface acting can be seen as a defensive form of resistance (Sturdy, 1998: 32). However, a more active

form of contesting the emotional terrain arises when the employees decide to provide philanthropic emotional labour. This was a consistent feature of interviews:

It is ethically difficult to explain to the vulnerable customer that he or she has to come for a second time with a full package of documents. [...] Some people, being in a difficult life situation, want to be listened to and in these cases, we are more psychologists than just consultants.

It's not easy to work with people, you know, they have different problems. [...] I feel sorry for old people who come here alone without someone to help them. [...] I remember an old man who came to get a document about his ownership over a flat. Only once he was here did he know that his son sold his part of the flat without telling his father! That was a shock for all of us!

The quality of public service appeared as a core value in the standards, regulations and policy legislation. The managers defined the goal of “better quality service” through three key components of service: ethics, speed and access. Ethics mainly concerned issues of politeness and ethical behaviour, i.e. not being corrupt. The new recruits learnt from their supervisors and managers that they should be polite and empathetic to the clients, and their role was to provide good quality service to citizens. Ethical behaviour is given particular emphasis in the training sessions, staff meetings, legal regulations and informal conversations between the management and front-line employees. Speed of the service mainly concerned three types: length of time waiting in the queue before being invited to the operator; length of time taken to submit an application and length of time waiting to receive a document. The efficient front-line employees were defined by the management as those “providing services quickly and correctly”. The third component of the service included different types of access: physical, language and cost. Physical access was defined as “equality to get access to the public services from cities and rural areas”, “easiness to reach the OSS office by public transport”, “convenience of opening times”, “convenience of conditions for disabled clients” etc. Language access was characterised as “clarity of procedures”, “service available both in Kazakh and Russian languages”. Cost access defined that “services should be affordable in financial terms by population, including disadvantaged groups”.

Implementation of these goals was explained by the management to staff through checklists of indicators like access (for service quality), number of clients served and number of documents accepted (for efficiency), as well as number of complaints and positive comments from clients (for ethics). The potential contradictions between these three goals, however, were not raised by the managers, neither in training nor in daily informal communication. The managers spoke about “professionalism” as an umbrella value that merged service quality, efficiency and ethics. A common message from the managers was that a professional front-line employee should be efficient, customer-orientated and work in conformity with the Code of Public Service Ethics. The definitions given to the term “professionalism” by the OSS managers combine three central aspects:

1. knowledge competence in service standards and legal regulations (“knowledge of standards and awareness of changes to the legislation”);
2. technical competence (“meeting the specific requirements of each service so that documents would be processed accurately by the stakeholder departments and customers would not have to visit OSS on the same matter”);
3. ethics (“performing ethical behaviour”).

The standard personnel practices involving on-the-job training, performance evaluation and appraisal can be seen as the backbone of the common occupational experience of the staff members. Personnel with two years or more experience at the single-window centres were considered as “veterans”. As a standard practice, the job contract included a commitment to work for 12 months with the opportunity to have this extended after the first year. However, the majority of staff did not remain at the OSS after the completion of the first year period, resulting in high turnover, which was characteristic of the front-line service work.

As was described in Chapter 6, the staff members were under strict, constant control and visual surveillance. Promotion was not a real prospect for majority of the employees as there were few management posts. The legislation allowed the managers to distribute bonuses among the staff by saving on administrative

expenditures, for example, the cost of paper, phone calls, postage, transportation etc. Individual bonuses were paid on the basis of performance results, which reflected the number of customers served, late shift arrivals, number of complaints etc. Both supervisor and manager were responsible to inform every employee about these parameters.

This section examined the selection and recruitment practices of the OSS staff with particular emphasis of the type of skills required for front-line positions. It was argued that social skills rather than technical skills were considered more important for good customer service both by the managers and employees. However, while performing emotional labour the staff had little scope for skill development given the routinised nature of tasks. This section also highlighted that there were gendered divisions amongst staff, as women were expected to be more flexible, communicative and empathetic to people compared to men. The following section explores gendered divisions in more detail in order to improve the understanding of the organisational culture within customer service environment.

7.2 GENDERED DIVISIONS

Gender played a significant role in organising the customer service environment in the OSS. As gender is embedded in workplace organisation, culture and practices, management relies heavily on both gendered assumptions and gendered divisions when restructuring work (Newsome, 2003). In gender terms managerial power at the OSS was male-dominated. There were about 30 percent of females among OSS managers and 80 percent of females among front-line employees. The OSS manager was typically a man suggesting the masculine character of technical knowledge and executive power. Reflecting this, the operational staff such as supervisors and front-line employees, were mostly women. Service work is itself gendered, based on an ethic of caring that is central to cultural ideas of femininity (Kittay, 2002). Williams (1995) suggested that it may be relatively unproblematic for women to embrace service work, while men may be inclined to approach it with some ambivalence.

Gender relations in the OSS need to be reviewed within Kazakhstani context. Despite gender equality declared in the Constitution of the Republic and Labour Law, the labour market in Kazakhstan is still segregated both vertically and horizontally in gender terms. Women are mainly employed in the low-paid service sectors like health, education, social care and occupy the lowest positions of employment hierarchies. Furthermore, Kazakhstani women continue to carry the main load of domestic work and childcare, contributing to the so-called double burden which characterises the gender politics of communism. A number of features distinguish the experience of Kazakhstani women working in the front-line customer service organisations compared to their counterparts in developed countries. Firstly, all OSS employees work full-time without any opportunity to choose a part-time position. Secondly, women have constant pressure to fulfil work responsibilities and carry most of the domestic work. The balance of domestic lives is still conservative and patriarchal, even among young couples with higher education. For married women the burdens of the day job and their domestic commitments effectively exclude the possibility to take a second job to increase their income.

The research findings suggest that women's resistance to stressful workplace conditions may entail blurring the boundaries between work and family. Female workers may "steal" time from work to handle family matters, use workplace resources for the benefit of the family, or even celebrate personal events like birthdays in the workplace as a way of humanising the environment. For instance, once at the end of the working day I was invited by the staff to celebrate an official holiday. The female workers brought home-made salads and cakes, and male employees helped to organise tables and chairs, and bring drinks. The management staff made toasts wishing good luck and success to the country and their organisation, and they thanked staff for their important contribution in service improvement. Everyone had a good laugh and the atmosphere was relaxed and positive. Similarly, the work of other researchers suggest that employees – male or female – who invest in ideals that conform with organisational ends may replace personal or family time with work-related activities and concerns (Hochschild,

1997). In the case of organisations focused on service delivery, there is a reason to anticipate that such employees will often be women. As one manager commented:

Some girls work too hard, in my view. They could stay even after working hours doing what they have not finished during day. Usually, these girls are not married yet and lack a personal life.

As was highlighted earlier in this chapter most managers and staff assumed that women were especially likely to have the kind of personality suited to the repetitive, yet highly pressurised work that characterises OSS work. A number of employees claimed, for example, that women were generally more able than men to handle the routine work, and “stick at the job” for longer. A supervisor commented in this regard:

I find that the girls do the work better, they can serve more customers, whereas men have breaks more often and try to do other things.

Some interviewees claimed that men did not tend to cope with the pressure involved in the work as women do. A manager commented:

I have been recruiting a very small percentage of males among employees. At the end of the day it is men who come and say that they want to leave.

The managers held gendered assumptions about the abilities of women and men to perform highly controlled, repetitive and routine job tasks, tending to conform to a long-held view that women were more suited than men to working as machine “operators” (Cockburn, 1985). Clearly, the persistence of this perception raises doubts regarding the extent to which female operators could actually further develop and enhance their social skills in the workplace. As Woodfield (1998) and others have argued, female social skill contributions in the workplace have in the past been ignored and undervalued, and because they are viewed as natural feminine characteristics, viewed as neither recognisable nor remunerable. The research findings on the issue of skill recognition in the specific OSS context gives a somewhat mixed picture in this respect. While, on the one hand, there was a general perception that women “naturally” possess the social skills deemed essential for customer service delivery, at the same time women employees were keen to

emphasise that they had worked extremely hard at learning, developing and refining these skills. Further, it was frequently claimed that front-line jobs were difficult to perform well, and there was evidence of a widespread conviction that front-office jobs were indeed “skilled jobs”. These views were expressed not only by the employees themselves, but also by the managers and supervisors.

Overall, there was little evidence that women’s social skills were undervalued within both case study organisations, despite the fact that these skills were understood by many to be naturally held. However, there was a widely held view that the expertise involved in the work was somewhat “invisible” to those outside the OSS setting, both within wider society and elsewhere within MJ and stakeholder departments. The managers spoke of the separation between the OSS and the rest of public sector organisations. The relatively low status of the single-window organisations was also reflected in wage levels. With the enactment of new legislation, average salaries of the front-line workers have fallen well below average civil service pay. Despite the fact that women’s social skills were in demand and recognised as central in customer service work, they continued to be poorly rewarded in financial terms.

A number of authors have observed that if women’s social skills are to become more visible, widely recognised and better compensated, they must be formally identified and recognised skills (Woodfield, 1998). My findings are more hopeful here as there is some evidence that the social competencies involved in the customer service work were recognised both by the managers and staff, and now being included in the job requirements for front-line positions. Clearly, formal qualifications may provide one way of recognising the competencies and skills involved in the OSS work, as well as providing employees with improved labour market opportunities. However, although these developments are encouraging, the research findings indicate that awareness and take-up of these qualifications at present remains low. The following section examines training strategies adopted in the single-window centres and how the managers and front-line personnel learnt new knowledge and skills required for integrating service provision.

7.3 STAFF TRAINING: KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Service integration is a new, challenging area for the Kazakhstani public sector, which requires a new set of knowledge and skills for joined-up service provision, and a cultural shift in thinking across professional and organisational boundaries. This section explores the utilisation and usefulness of training strategies adopted in the OSS; to what extent they met demands of the managers and front-line personnel, and how the managers and staff learnt new knowledge and skills to deliver multiple services through single-window arrangements.

All manager participants from different regions agreed that training institutions could not meet their needs in terms of specific knowledge and skills required for improving the effectiveness of customer service. Cooperation with local universities was usually limited to the short-term courses on improving Kazakh language and computer skills. The managers tended to differentiate themselves as “practitioners” and stressed demand in combination with practical and theoretical knowledge. The participants acknowledged that local universities were not able to provide valuable offers for the OSS. The Public Administration Academy under the President of RK delivered some courses on quality standards. However, according to the OSS managers these courses did not meet their needs and expectations. Although some courses on quality management delivered by the business training centres could be beneficial for the single-window centres, public sector organisations could not afford them. The international projects such as EU Tacis and USAID/Pragma provided advisory support in organising a series of training workshops for the OSS managers. However, single, ad-hoc courses were not able to cover a large number of target group on a regular basis. Given the shortage of financial resources the single-window centres were not able to invite international or local business consultants to deliver advice on the establishment of single-window arrangements. The managers expressed concern about the lack of available literature in Russian and Kazakh languages for self-education. The responses from the managers and front-line staff coincided in that they both said they particularly needed training in delivering complex services such as property, business and land registration (Janenova, 2008a).

In these conditions where local institutions lacked the capacity to provide adequate training to develop a pool of “universal” employees, the OSS developed an induction scheme for all new entrants. At the start of employment new recruits had to undertake a four-week induction programme during which newcomers were socialised into the culture and beliefs of the organisation. Most of the time was spent sitting with a senior colleague observing the service process with informal and spontaneous storytelling about work, which framed norms, values and coping mechanisms. New recruits were taken through the full cycle of service provision from initial consultation to issuing a final document. Trainees were taught how to navigate through the computer system to be able to search for information on service standards and legislation. To keep updated with amendments to legislation the staff were required to read legal documents and get information through management briefings and training. The second part of induction scheme took place in the stakeholder departments. By sitting near civil servants, observing the process of application review and asking questions, new recruits could examine service provision from different angles: both at the front-office and back-office. Induction in the government bodies usually lasted for a month with one week spent in each department. The employees were provided with informal advice from supervisors and managers in the area of social communication with customers. As a manager commented in this regard:

We teach our staff to speak with clients politely, with a smile. We would like to invite professional trainers but it's quite expensive for us. So we refer to our life experience in giving advice to young staff, for example, how to behave in conflict situations.

Most OSS across regions engaged in “coaching”, where new recruits had a mentor who supported them during the first month of working in the new environment. In the case study organisations coaching was also actively practiced to ensure on-the-job qualification improvement. For example, one of the activities during coaching was providing feedback by the mentor to the new employees. The mentor observed interactions between clients and new recruits, made notes and gave feedback to the trainees in a form of dialogue, where both sides discussed strengths and weaknesses in the service provision and behaviour of new recruits. Other senior colleagues also

provided informal advice and tips based on their personal experience, which the new staff found extremely helpful.

The front-line staff participated in the regular seminars organised with the support of the stakeholder departments, whose representatives came on a weekly basis to give a presentation. The government officials informed the front-line employees about new amendments to the legislation related to the services, clarified problematic issues on specific services within their scope of authorities. At the seminars the staff had opportunities to address questions directly to the colleagues from stakeholder departments, which enabled them to facilitate negotiation between the front-office and back-office employees. The colleagues from the front-office and back-office discussed common reasons for frequent mistakes, developed suggestions for improvement and learnt to build trustful relationships. The results of the discussions were reflected in the protocol signed by the managers from OSS and government bodies, and circulated amongst the staff of both organisations. As a manager described this process:

Legislation is constantly changing [...] it is quite difficult for us to track all changes in different areas of service provision without the consultation of experts. In the beginning we had problems of misunderstanding. [...] For example, when we worked according to the information received from civil servants orally during seminars, they could return unprocessed documents saying that documents were accepted incorrectly. Then to avoid confusion the stakeholders and ourselves we sign protocols of the meetings when we find agreement on minor changes in service process.

The problem of training in a diversity of services was related to the lack of clear guidelines of the procedures and the vagueness of strategic instructions, as was highlighted in Chapter 6. Learning on service provision in multiple areas was gradually accumulated through observations, acquiring technical and procedural knowledge by the front-office staff during their time working with back-office employees. New knowledge was communicated among the OSS personnel through oral communication and daily routine practices. As the manager of the MJ noted:

It would take half a year for new staff to understand what was going whereas during the short-term induction they can immediately see the work in practice both in the front-office and back-office and learn the process.

While the managers were generally positive about the OSS values and norms, many employees were critical of them. When asked to reflect about value of formal training, including sessions conducted by the managers and government officials from stakeholder departments, and on-the-job training, responses from the OSS managers and employees differed to a great degree. The managers were positive about the value of formal training, with an emphasis on their important role in leading training sessions and keeping staff updated with new amendments to the legislation. As two managers commented:

We train our staff on a regular basis: we conduct training ourselves and invite colleagues from the government bodies to clarify problematic issues on service provision within the scope of their authority. Then we assess staff knowledge with tests on standards and regulations, which we developed ourselves.

If there are important amendments to the legislation related to our services, me or my deputy debrief staff for 15 minutes, normally between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. when both shifts are at the workplace.

However, the experienced employees were sceptical on the usefulness of sessions conducted by their managers, but were positive regarding training delivered by the managers from stakeholder departments.

It is a good idea to invite practitioners from state bodies to explain procedures, and we then have the opportunity to ask direct questions on the problems we face in providing their services. But our managers would not tell us anything new, maybe except the legal amendments, which we can read ourselves.

I don't agree with the assessment system. [...] You can know by heart all standards and regulations, but in practice fail to implement them. So when you pass a test, you will get the best mark?! Or maybe you were lucky to tick the right box? During daily work we remember all these standards by referring to them every time we serve a client. So these tests are additional stress for us.

In contrast to the staff members with experience of working at the OSS, many newcomers perceived formal training as contributing towards their professionalism and tended to pay more attention to them compared to their senior colleagues. Both

managers and staff had consensus on the value of the induction as practical, relevant and extremely useful. During the induction, the newcomers learnt the process steps of service delivery from the first customer contact to the delivery of the processed document.

7.4 SUMMARY

This chapter considered selection and recruitment as well as training policies adopted within OSS environment. In particular, it focused on gendered divisions amongst the staff, which played an important role in formation of social competencies in customer service work. It has raised related questions about the character and appropriateness of selection, recruitment and training policies in the single-window centres.

The selection and recruitment process of the managers was based on a patronage system through personal relations, friendship and mutual obligation. The personnel management system for managerial jobs transferred the paternalistic system from the traditional bureaucracy. By contrast, selection and recruitment for the front-line jobs followed a different approach aimed to identify the existence of social competencies, which were significant for face-to-face, intensive customer service provision. Training was used to make those competencies appropriate to the particular workflows. The work demanded that the personnel had to be continually energetic and enthusiastic in exercising highly emotionally demanding and repetitive work, and the selection process aimed to identify “suitable workers”.

In theory, the rise of the service economy could lead to the re-evaluation of those social skills traditionally associated with women’s work, disrupting the long established pattern in which women’s work has been undervalued, poorly recognised and rewarded. This chapter examined whether there were any indications that this was taking place in the particular case study organisations. The research findings showed that “feminine” social skills did play a central role in public service provision, and that as a consequence, women were deemed to be particularly suited

to it. However, women were also recruited to the front-line positions because they were perceived to be more capable of dealing with the monotony of the work and the regimented work environment. The highly standardised and controlled nature of work organisation within OSS environment constrained the extent to which women's social skills could be used and further enhanced. This created a situation in which thousands of women were being recruited to the OSS for their perceived social skills and competencies, and then only allowed to use them to a very limited extent. Furthermore, women were also most heavily concentrated in those areas of service delivery, particularly in customer service roles, that attracted the lowest financial rewards and lack of career prospects. These trends were found in both case study organisations as well as across the regions.

However, this chapter also pointed to the emergence of a more optimistic picture on the issue of skill recognition rather than just the continuation of these well-established trends in the sexual division of labour. Although women were often deemed to “naturally” possess the social competencies required for customer service, there was little indication in the interviews that this meant that these skills were ignored or undervalued within the OSS settings. Rather, it was repeatedly emphasised by the managers and staff that customer service was indeed “skilled work”. The front-line employees were particularly keen to talk about the social skills that they had developed, particularly in handling difficult customers, building rapport and controlling conversations. Indeed, the managers encouraged staff to recognise the skills involved in their work by providing training programmes specifically designed in order to raise personal awareness and self-confidence amongst young employees.

In these intensified work environments, the personnel experienced considerable psychological stress. The research evidence suggested that the largest part of the stress was absorbed by the front-line employees. There was frequent evidence of resistance, disengagement, low motivation, and burnout. The question of how staff dealt with stress is very important, particularly in view of evidence that constant stress leads to high turnover. The average service length for the OSS was 18 months,

which coincides with the findings of Fernie (1998) in this regard. The fact that more and more services are added on a continuing basis to the list of OSS services is a substantial factor in producing stress. More immediate stressors include the ongoing service of customers.

The mixed messages of recruitment, selection and training reflected the complex tensions and contradictions across goals and means in the OSS work operations. While recruits might not be “special” in the sense that the managers used the term, the rigour of selection and training might have something to do with identifying people with survival as well as communication skills; those who had strength to get through at least 30 customers a day while being constantly recorded and assessed through electronic means. What the research project observed is consistent with wider research. Summing up a variety of “empowerment” studies, largely in the service sector, Hales (1999: 7) notes that one of the key concomitants of empowerment is, “ex-ante control, in the form of careful employee recruitment and training to select “empowerable” employees and to inculcate the skills and attitudes conducive to exercising “responsible” choice.”

Yet, the research findings showed that attempts to identify and utilise social competencies was a problematic and uneven process. The tight job specification and extensive surveillance over the front-line staff demonstrated this unambiguously. As a result, the tension in the labour process between the mobilisation of employee attributes and the deliberate standardisation of social competencies was merely part of a wider tension between the “demands” of quantity and quality (Bain et al., 2002) as was described in Chapter 5. What was distinctive about this process in customer service work was the continual negotiation and re-negotiation over the transformation of emotional labour power into serviceable products.

The common problems of low motivation, high turnover and the poor status of customer service organisations were recognised as important within single-window centres. The important observation was that the OSS reflected certain modern management tendencies: they spoke a language of teamwork, coaching and support,

but still the overriding message was about meeting statistical targets. This induced a culture of authoritarianism and institutionalised defensiveness, with each level of the organisation thus putting pressure on the level below. The quality tension meant that customer service rhetoric and quality customer care were put against pressure to keep service short in order to maintain service levels and meet performance targets. Classically, the OSS relied on deskilled labour and low wage rates.

Collective watching and acting of the front-line staff in the work context, and exchange of ideas with the government officials can be identified as key to enabling factors for reflection on daily work practices. Development of ideas for service quality improvement did not necessarily depend on the emergence of contradictions. The combination of diverse experiences, backgrounds and work approaches of the front-office and back-office staff enabled them to create an environment for individual and organisational learning. Many participants referred to the change in their own views of traditional work practices. As one front-line worker who was a former civil servant put it:

In the past I thought that only my organisation could provide professional consultation on business registration as this area is very complex and specific. But now I see that the single-window centre can deal better with clients in terms of consultation and providing informational services than government bodies as we learnt how to work with clients and deliver customer-oriented service, whereas state bodies have now more time and resources to concentrate on the review of the applications and legislation.

Learning and information exchange were considered as important activities by the managers:

We didn't know what to start with: we were all from different sectors, with various expertise. We talked, listened, discussed, argued [...] Well, it was a painful process [...] but we can see that as a result of our enormous work, service quality is improving, this is the main result.

Both quotes illustrate that the relationships between the front-office and back-office staff has progressed in a positive direction over four years of policy implementation. This chapter explored the how the relationship between the OSS and stakeholder has changed. This has been from the open confrontation and antagonism of the

traditional bureaucracy to the new public organisations who have gradually learnt to negotiate with each other, find consensus, deliver joined-up services, and adopt technologies through mutual training and observations. Thus, the single-window centres have created a learning environment that encourages individuals and public sector organisations to work towards public service improvement. The following chapter explores organisational learning experiences of the managers and employees within the case study organisations and analyses what type of the “communities of practice” have emerged and developed among the front-line personnel.

8. LEARNING WITHIN THE “COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE” OF THE KAZAKH ONE STOP SHOPS

Organisational culture in the case study organisations provided a context for studying professional socialisation of the front-line staff within specific settings. As demonstrated by examples in Chapters 6 and 7, informal workgroup communities within the single-window centres have developed not only consent but also resistance to the management directives (for example, towards constant visual surveillance, performance targets). As was demonstrated throughout the thesis, the front-line staff were involved in a series of related conflicts since the single-window centres could be characterised by “treating people as machines while espousing that they are “valued”; wanting control while seeking contained initiative and flexibility; espousing an atmosphere of trust while utilising technologies of distrust” (Houlihan, 2002: 80).

The study of the front-line employees’ socialisation in the OSS enables us to highlight the social construction of organisational learning, since while the values of efficiency and quality are formally declared by management, their actual implementation and interpretation takes place within specific communities. Thus, this chapter aims to explore learning experiences of the managers and front-line employees using single and double loop learning theory (Argyris and Schon, 1978a), theories of the “communities of practice” (CoP) (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and “communities of coping” (Korczynski, 2002a). In particular, this chapter starts with focusing on the analysis of personal and social strategies for coping utilised by the staff and exploring dimensions of the relations between the managers and employees. It moves on to examine the nature of learning encouraged by the management staff and impact of the organisational learning on customer service performance.

8.1 PERSONAL AND SOCIAL STRATEGIES FOR COPING

It is evident from the field data that, while positive and negative outcomes prevailed, they were mediated by both personal modes of coping and organisational sustaining mechanisms. Survival as a front-line worker required commitment, determination, goodwill and flexibility. It was illustrated in Chapters 6 and 7 that the staff members were under constant pressure to achieve both quantitative and qualitative performance targets, and perform emotional labour while delivering customer service. The front-line job is mythologised as simple and routine, which is a surface fact beyond which there are many complex role and skill demands. Research by Sturdy (1998) identifies the fluctuating nature of attitudes and commitment to customer services work, with employees, in his terms, “smiling and sometimes meaning it”. Sturdy (1998) describes role embracement as temporary, limited and contradictory. The reasons for this have less to do with the task itself than with the background and context within which staff work.

The employees at the single-window centres adopted a different range of cognitive strategies to make sense of their environments. Motivation was rooted in perceptions of fair play. The staff, while commenting on their relationship with their work demonstrated a mental storyline as to what they expected from their employer and most adjusted their expectations to minimise frustration. As one operator reflected:

When we were invited to work at the OSS, we were promised competitive salaries, high status and excellent conditions of work, but they didn't keep their promise... Well, now I am used to work with clients, though it's not easy, and if we were better paid, I could have stayed here.

It was when these expectations were frustrated, when they perceived that they were being mistreated, or they perceived management as distancing itself from responsibility for system breakdowns, that morale and work effort deteriorated.

A further mediating fact was the shaping role of supervisors at the OSS. As facilitators, advocates and support workers, the supervisors were a vital source of stress mediation. Team leaders play an important role in managing interpretation,

performance and meaning (Houlihan, 1999). Given the fact that most employees had little contact or access to the decisions being made about their work, “management at the MJ” was often an abstract, remote and faceless construct. Crucially, the management was represented for most staff by the immediate actions of their supervisors and managers, and the continuously changing nature of the systems within which they operated. The employees did not fully benefit from weekly staff meetings as they were concerned about raising their frustrations and problems. They preferred to talk about their work with colleagues and tell each other stories about customers during breaks. In all of these ways, implicit or explicit, clashes between organisation and personal interests were resolved quite unconsciously. However, this acted in neither the management’s nor staff’s long-term interests as issues persisted and became long-term problems.

Development of resistance to the management directives was described as collectively shared and socially transmitted. Consequently, it can be seen as the predominant indication of the development of communities of practice among staff who channelled their growing frustration and criticism into acts of subversion, which were learnt and exercised through informal socialisation. Many employees said that they learnt from co-workers that when the client submitted documents, they sent him or her to the bank, which was located within the same office as the OSS, to pay the fee and wait, without calling for another customer, until that client returned with payment confirmation. This allowed employees to have about 10 minutes break during which they could pretend to examine applications. The staff realised that this did not represent “best practice”. According to the respondents such behaviour was encouraged in informal socialisation that took place predominantly during the induction at the OSS, lunch times and after-work gatherings. During the induction period some experienced colleagues described themselves speaking with newcomers about “special arrangements” that “could make life in the OSS easier”. Such talk took place over breaks as well as in gatherings that took place in the evening when the personnel met together, for example, in the local pub. The senior employees said that they could reliably separate those newcomers who were loyal to the system from those who were critical of the system:

You can ask them what they think about payment, bonuses and performance appraisal system, and immediately you know what the type of this person is.

This is arguably the course of development of the communities that characterise the front-line staff in the case study organisations. The following section explores the nature of learning encouraged by the managerial staff amongst front-line employees and the impact of organisational learning on the overall customer service.

8.2 SINGLE OR DOUBLE LOOP LEARNING?

To begin to unfold individual learning processes and identify levels of learning, the participants were asked how often they received feedback on their performance. Responses from the front-line staff indicate that they receive mostly negative feedback, particularly if they make mistakes in their job, demonstrating therefore that they are not conforming to the performance targets. As the staff comment in this regard:

I get feedback if I have done something wrong, for example, my documents have a mistake. It's OK to make a mistake once, but you shouldn't repeat mistakes.

Some operators get criticized for their mistakes, but some do not, and I think it's not fair.

If you do your job well, it's taken for granted, but if you do something wrong, you get immediate reaction.

Argyris and Schon (1978a) suggest that lack of feedback creates isolation for the individual and fragmentation for the organisation, resulting in a lack of linkage between individual mental models and shared mental models and implies a "them and us" relationship between management and "others". The managers of the OSS claim that they receive both positive and negative feedback from senior managers of the MJ. If Argyris and Schon's (1978a) argument is followed, this implies that double loop learning is likely to take place so that individuals understand why their prior meaning-making systems had to change. An issue which emerges from the interviews with the managers is why, when they receive positive feedback, they fail

to engage in positive feedback with their direct subordinates – front-line staff. The root assumptions and guiding beliefs of the OSS industry are evidenced, though inexplicitly, in decisions about strategy, structure and management approach. It was highlighted throughout the thesis that managerial decisions are made according to strict hierarchy and heavily influenced by prevailing norms of traditional bureaucracy. The staff feel trapped in the cycle of following performance targets, but lacking positive, encouraging feedback.

When I get a “thank you for your help, you explained everything to me, you helped me to fill in documents correctly”, it makes me feel that I’ve done something useful [...] I’m not wasting my time. But, often there is rush, rush, rush, and I feel like a machine. Soon they will change the work process with the Internet, they are working on it now. I suppose it will be even more difficult to work here.

For many employees, work at the OSS represents a transitional opportunity into a civil service career. Yet, routinisation and regulations enable the organisation to reduce its dependence on employees’ competency, to utilise a less expensive range of skills creating disciplined and “replicant” semi-professionals. This has the result that front-line jobs, being considered as semi-professional, i.e. not requiring a degree in the specific area and prior experience, have introduced a loss of career, status and opportunity. The OSS are information handling organisations. As currently characterised, the job of the front-line employee is to be the face of the organisation, interfacing with the client. As the research findings show throughout this thesis, the staff are largely constructed as “a mouth- and hand-piece” rather than as a “brain”, which is confirmed by the responses both from the managers and employees themselves.

The research findings suggest that the front-line work is a complex blend of knowing, sensing and rule applying. The staff members use a complex, largely unacknowledged set of personal skills. They are expected to use their knowledge and skills to adapt to the mood and needs of the customer to achieve a particular outcome, such as the correct acceptance of application, which results in the timely and smooth service delivery. The evidence shows that the front-line workers are not required to think beyond a programmed level. Problems or non-routine solutions are

the matter of the supervisors and managers. The employee does not have official authority to deal with or learn from their experiences or feed this learning back into the system.

Information processing is a useful metaphor here as it conveys something of the limits of this system. Engestrom (1990) and others strongly voice the perspective that learning requires contextualisation of the concepts and skills to be learned. In the OSS learning takes place around service delivery processes. It does not attend to the business as a whole, or even the processes beyond the employee's operations. An example of this assumption in action is the use of technology to measure length of interaction between the client and operator. This level of control betrays an assumption about the front-line employee as automaton and the activity as simple and explicit. After all, it is easier to measure time than morale.

As a way of exploring single and double loop learning levels, participants were asked if they challenged upwardly in relation to how things are done in the OSS. It was highlighted in Chapter 3 that single loop learning describes situations where individuals are comfortable performing within their sphere of competence and stick to the tried and tested (Argyris and Schon, 1978a), while double loop learning requires individuals questioning and challenging the successes of the organisation, leading to a deeper level of understanding and reassessment of values and assumptions. All participants among front-line staff suggest that difficult questions are not asked nor challenges made. The staff members discuss that they are regarded as trouble makers if they question established processes. When individuals are controlled and confined within their roles, they appear to exhibit the characteristics of single loop learning, in failing to question. This apparent lack of questioning enables management of the OSS to maintain control by rigid rules and the prescribed ways of doing things. As the employees highlight in their answers:

Why should we question? We just have to work.

I tend not to bother the manager, it's not my position to question.

I have some ideas for improvement, but nothing will change if I tell them.

The managers of the OSS reflected on whether their employees were able to question them and provided a number of honest insights:

They can ask questions. But it won't change anything as we have standards and regulations given from the Ministry and we have to follow these rules.

As long as there is a good reason, I don't mind questions.

Some of my employees question me, but the agenda is set, and I can't change anything.

The research findings indicate that if the front-line workers do attempt single loop learning and operate within taken for granted assumptions or attempt double loop learning and challenge fundamental assumptions in the organisation, then the managers may apply significant constraints, for instance, "it won't change anything", "we have to follow these rules", "the agenda is set". These constraints may be enacted in ways which limit individuals to the double loop learning; the reinforcement of conformity and of the "thinker" (manager) and "doer" (employee) relationship. By constraining their staff to the single loop learning, the managers reinforce the prescribed rules. The procedural steps are learnt and repeated while any creative movements are unlikely due to apparent "handcuffs on learning" (Schein, 1999).

From the managers' perspective when asked about their opportunities to question and challenge senior management at the MJ, their views differed. One OSS manager explained that they had some autonomy, but then he continued that autonomy was given as long as they kept their coordinators in the MJ informed about what was happening in the OSS. Some managers claimed that it was difficult to question senior colleagues from the MJ as they often became defensive and therefore they tended not to. One manager offered an explanation for this defensive behaviour, suggesting that managers from the MJ were not used to communicating freely and working in a horizontal way.

The managers at the ministry are used to give orders in top-down way. We are at the bottom level in relation to the ministry, so we are not supposed to ask uncomfortable questions that are difficult to explain, we are expected to perform what is required.

This view tends to reflect the traditional management paradigm, in which there are few transfers across divisional lines and reinforces the views of Argyris and Schon (1978a), who suggest that there is a defensive tendency among organisational members to protect themselves from open confrontation and critique hence they do not engage in questioning or challenging. Argyris and Schon (1996b) explain this behaviour as managers attempting to avoid vulnerability, risk, embarrassment and the appearance of incompetence. The evidence from the observation of interactions between top-management of the MJ and OSS managers at the two official meetings, which are discussed below, provide description of the environment created by traditional bureaucracy, in which questioning is not the norm and there are limited opportunities to challenge.

In October 2007, I was invited by the Deputy Chairman of the Registry Committee, Mr. Bakhyt Shalkarov, to participate at the first round-table dedicated to the evaluation of OSS performance by international experts. All OSS managers at the regional level were expected to participate in this important event. The round table took place in the large conference hall within the office of the MJ in Astana. Senior managers from the MJ, the Vice-Minister and two deputies of the Chairman of the Registry Committee, were sitting at the top of the impressive desk in new black-leathered armchairs and looking down at the audience. The managers of the OSS, around 50 people, were sitting in the modest chairs organised in the several rows like they were preparing to watch a theatre performance. Such distanced separation prevented any discussion in the role of equal partners. The atmosphere from the start of the event till the very end was characterised by official, top-down interaction between managers from the MJ and OSS, expressed in the form of critical comments, “naming and shaming” some of the OSS, and explaining the new directions in the strategy of policy development. Although the OSS managers had few opportunities

to ask questions or express their opinions regarding working issues, none of them used this opportunity.

During the second round-table which took place in June 2008 similar behaviour among the OSS managers was observed: they were reluctant to participate in an open discussion of the issues related to the performance of the single-window centres in the presence of the top-management of the MJ. The OSS managers might have felt concern about the potential consequences of their questions. They were silent during the entire meeting which passed in the form of monologue from senior management of the MJ on what managers of the OSS should and should not do, and what procedures would be taken in the case of poor organisational performance. Only after the Secretary-General of the MJ left the conference room at the middle of the meeting did the OSS managers start to give feedback based on their experiences and give recommendations on how the communication channels between the single-window centres and stakeholder departments could be improved, what kind of training was required for their staff, and what constraints they faced in terms of the lack of clear guidelines on the design of joined-up services. In both cases after the official meetings the OSS managers seemed relaxed and expressed a willingness to learn from experience of colleagues in other OSS:

I wish we had more opportunities to meet with colleagues from other regions to exchange ideas and practices. It would be useful if, say, five employees of my OSS would go to Astana or Almaty OSS, which are the most advanced and learn how they work there, then bring new ideas back and help to improve our performance.

If we had available resources, I would send ten of my staff to other regions for several weeks and invite staff from the single-window centres of neighbouring region to exchange experience, brainstorm ideas on how to improve customer service. [...] My front-line employees need communication with their colleagues. Okay, we, managers meet regularly in Astana, but our staff never have a chance to meet. It is difficult to work on your own, you don't know if you are doing it right or wrong. [...] Really, everyone is stewed in one's own juice.

Thus, the narratives of participants and observations reveal that managers of the OSS and front-line staff are restricted to repetitive steps and at best single loop learning. When referring to double loop learning, identified by Swieringa and Wierdsma

(1992) as more fundamentally questioning and challenging why things are done, the theory does not differentiate between this process as being upward or downward questioning and challenging in an organisational hierarchy. Therefore, the managers of the OSS were asked if they questioned and challenged their coordinating managers from the MJ. The overwhelming response was that OSS managers were instructed by the managers of MJ, implying at most a level of single loop learning in the sense of what they should be doing and what guidelines to follow. The managers of the OSS highlighted a definite “them” (management from the MJ) and “us” culture and relationships which reinforces the master-servant relationship characteristics of the bureaucracy and the role of “doers” and “thinkers”. It was also observed that managers from the MJ were status conscious. As the managers comment in this regard:

They (managers from MJ) rarely ask our feedback and when they do, people are suspicious, as they are concerned for their jobs.

The officials from the Ministry try to show their authority by giving different orders, for example, to help someone to get service faster and or to give someone individual consultation. Some managers from the Ministry are Okay to work with, but some have low respect and put pressure on both us and our staff.

These responses highlight evidence of the divide between organisational “thinkers” and “doers” in learning (Dixon, 1998). The OSS managers begin to get a feel for some freedom to learn but the managers from the MJ shut them down, forcing them to the tightly defined job role. These findings can be aligned with Field’s (1997) argument that when individuals learn, the manager may feel insecure, threatened and can tighten control by undermining the activities that facilitate learning. Field (1997) identifies with this “management jealousy” when describing manager’s reactions to individuals when they are empowered to learn. One of the managers described being involved in the strategic process of organisational importance and the reaction by his coordinator from the MJ to that:

When I was involved in the Inter-governmental working group on developing a set of new standards for services, my coordinator complained that I was never in my office and he couldn’t reach me by phone. I know that he was jealous of my input into the steering group.

It has been argued that for learning to take place in an organisation, encouragement must be explicitly forthcoming and embedded in the context: the manager's role is fundamental in achieving this. Emphasising the importance of the manager's role in unlocking or inhibiting learning in organisations, manager participants were asked to describe what they perceived their role to be in supporting and encouraging learning and how they felt if their employees were learning:

I should be giving my staff some autonomy to challenge, experiment, but I am not allowed to empower.

I feel a great deal of satisfaction when I see that my people learn and develop. If people learn, quality of service is improved.

To further explore levels of learning and experiences, and reflecting some impact of the investment in training and development, the OSS managers were asked how often they were encouraged to take risks. Argyris and Schon (1978a) associate double loop learning with radical change, suggesting that the role of managers is fundamental at this level, to encourage risk taking. Not surprisingly in light of the previous findings, all participants, both OSS managers and front-line employees, claimed that they were not encouraged to take risks. The managers emphasised that some mistakes were inevitable in their jobs because they were learning by trial-and-error.

What we do is new for Kazakhstan, and it's a natural process that all of us can make mistakes. The important thing is to learn from mistakes and improve customer service.

The OSS managers accepted that making mistakes was a serious matter, but they believed that most mistakes were not so serious as to cost employees their jobs. However, one manager commented that he was concerned with regard to making mistakes as staff were "waiting for some reaction from him". Argyris and Schon (1996b) may explain this experience when they comment that managers often blame others at the precise time when learning can occur in organisation.

We are not allowed to take risks, we have very tightly defined jobs.

Since the staff members came to the OSS from a range of social, economic, cultural and educational backgrounds, and from organisations with different traditions, they brought a wide range of professional values to their workplace. General values of punctuality, discipline and so on were used implicitly in their workplace behaviours by the staff. However, the values that were mentioned explicitly, which contributed to the workers' learning included: acting responsibly, providing good customer service. For example, value "serving for a citizen" is seen as an important way not only for knowing details of standards, procedures and legal documents, but also basic psychological aspects of communication.

So you know the procedures, you get experience in working with customers, that's when you understand what to do to make clients satisfied.

Human curiosity is an important force underpinning behaviour in the workplace. Therefore, when workers encounter large or small problems, their instinct is to try to solve them (Gerber, 1998: 173). These attempts vary in their success in the OSS. The workers under coordination of the supervisor and manager discuss alternatives for solving problems and attempt the most obvious solution. If the solution of a problem requires the cooperation of stakeholder departments, their representatives are invited for discussions with staff members and managers at the OSS. The proposal to improve service quality, for instance, by simplifying the procedure is sent for review to the management at the MJ who takes the final decision. As the OSS manager indicated:

Problem solving is a part of our job. We discuss problems with staff, look at options for solutions. I try to show my staff the whole picture of our work rather than just bits and pieces [...] Finally, we need to coordinate our actions with the Ministry and, if they agree, we take a step forward.

Thus, the research findings suggest that learning at the OSS does occur through the interaction of front-line employees with managers and colleagues from stakeholder departments. Learning does occur when new recruits watch experienced colleagues performing tasks and then attempt to replicate their actions. This form of guided participation is both intended when the mentor demonstrates an activity to a new

recruit and unintended when the newcomer noticed something happening and observed the activity accidentally.

8.3 SUMMARY

The following themes have emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the OSS managers and staff discussed in this chapter. The control model is sadly reflecting the situation of single-window centres. It is rooted in standard measurement, monitoring, correction and short-term targeting. The personnel's time is utilised to the maximum in the pursuit of the service coverage and achievement of shifting goals. When each action is prescribed, there is no ambiguity left, and little room for imagination and development. When all processes are formalised, there is no space in the system. Yet organisational slack is more than just space for escape, it can become a space for learning. Organisational learning is not a goal in itself, but a key factor in sustainability. The fundamental principle of learning is the ability to identify, build and retain organisational knowledge. For the front-line staff, learning is constructed at the level of the routine; learning new routines, standards, technologies, unlearning the old and becoming accomplished in meeting the changing numerical targets.

Hence, this research suggests that learning does take place within the OSS environment, but too often in an underdeveloped form. Reporting on every action of the organisation could be viewed as a demonstration of organisational reflexivity, but the pressure for short-term targets makes the manner in which they are used defensive rather than reflective. In this environment, learning comes into conflict with short-term problems and intensifies the performance and push capability to the limit. This is adaptive, located, structure-based learning, which is situated in the context of the front-line staff not being encouraged to think on the organisation's behalf.

However, again looking at the spaces in between the ideal and real, there is evidence of learning strategies at work. In the single-window centres though time for informal interaction is severely restricted, storytelling among colleagues persists. Stories provide a valuable counterpoint to the relatively structured and controlled nature of the job. More importantly, telling of stories is a means by which perspectives are shared and shaped throughout the organisation, and “communities of practice” are developed.

The individuals are operating at the level of “not learning” as identified by the lack of questioning, lack of challenge, the reluctance to take risks, and managerial control mechanisms, both implicit and explicit, which prevents the development of learning levels, and which reinforces the routinised steps. The participants discussed their management-employee relationships as “them and us” interactions in which individuals felt constrained. The control and constraints placed on the front-line employees have been clearly highlighted, with all participants claiming that they are not encouraged to take risks. Significantly, the narratives revealed the crucial role that managers can play in inhibiting learning in organisation. By constraining their teams to the prescribed rules and procedures, the managers reinforce the routinised steps. Therefore, the personnel are trapped in single loop learning in order to perform their job roles. Any new actions as sources of creativity, improvisation or motivation and prerequisites of double loop learning are inhibited by the management approach.

Given the small sample and case study methodology used here, it is not possible to make any firm generalisations as to whether this observation is representative of other OSS. The study tried to expose the process by which CoPs developed among the staff and the social role they played, underlining the ways in which CoPs can inform resistance within service work. The CoPs that developed in the single-window centres may have contributed to maintaining order but in so doing they made the social order less open to management intervention. The development of CoPs was represented in the interviews by three central themes:

1. learning the contradictions;
2. realising the organisational limits; and
3. working the system.

Each theme represents a stage in an underlying sequence of informal socialisation. In the first stage, newcomers learned the contradictions inherent in managerial ideology. The resulting disenchantment was strengthened by the frustration of realising the practical limits of the organisation, when managers did not provide solutions, organisational technologies and conditions did not meet their goals and expectations. Many of the senior employees became critical of the organisational system in which they worked. Turning to their peer group and informal socialisation became a substitute for relying on managers and formal training. The CoP that developed was therefore, in the case of staff, a substitute for formal organisational roles and expectations. It resembles the “communities of coping” (Korczynski, 2003b) that took shape in the backstage and combined consent to procedures with a subversion of goals. The following chapter presents an overview of the public sector culture with particular emphasis on the illegal practices in service delivery in order to examine the extent of the impact of the traditional bureaucracy on the culture of the new single-window organisations.

9. CORRUPTION AS A CULTURAL ASPECT AND THE VIEWS OF SERVICE USERS

This chapter examines the nature of illegal practices within single-window centres and customers' views on the quality of public services delivered through the OSS. Cases of illegal practices are presented to illustrate the scope of the corruption in the new public service organisations. Customer views add a new perspective on the service integration and perceptions of the single-window centres compared to the traditional government bodies. Section 9.1 starts with explanation of the meaning of "corruption" in the country context. It illustrates examples of the misuse of power and resources by the political management of the MJ and administrative management within the OSS. Section 9.2 explores customers' perceptions of the single-window centres and quality of public services delivered through OSS. The final section summarises the arguments presented in this chapter.

9.1 ILLEGAL PRACTICES IN THE OSS

Corruption is considered to be a part of public sector culture in Kazakhstan (Cummings, 2005). Though regulations on combating the power abuse and bribery existed in the Criminal Code of the USSR, the term "corruption" was not accepted officially, and was not actually in use. Corruption in the Soviet Union was concentrated in the spheres of distribution, lobbying for administrative decisions and the delivery of services to the population: awarding of flats and vouchers to recreation centres, bonuses, public allowances, the purchase of imported home appliances etc. (Jandosova et al., 2002). Petty, but mass corruption when getting references, documents, commodities in short supply, rooms in hotels, medical treatment or transportation tickets, was associated with an inefficient administrative system.

Transition from a centralised control system of the economy to state regulation in Kazakhstan has promoted the formation of a more professional civil service, formalisation of many administrative procedures, especially in the budgetary system and in the state procurement sector, the strengthening of transparency and the introduction of electronic document turnover. The Law of RK “On Combating Corruption” was adopted with the assistance of international organisations in 1998 as a demonstration of the obligations of the state. Anti-Corruption Action Plans are adopted every four years, and a wide public campaign on combating corruption has recently been launched by the President. The government believes that problems of corruption can be solved through the acceptance of the special laws against corruption and the tightening of punishments, which result in massive arrests of government officials at the political and administrative levels. Corruption is a system of attitudes and values which penetrates all structures of the Kazakhstani public sector and society. However, as highlighted in the introductory chapter, anti-corruption measures seem to fail to diminish corruption and this is demonstrated by the stable position of Kazakhstan among the most corrupt countries in the world according to different international ratings (Kaufman et al, 2009; Transparency International, 2009).

The public sector in Kazakhstan is characterised by “oriental” corruption meaning that corruption in the country is deeply entrenched in the social system (Perlman and Gleason, 2007). The corruption system is closely connected with all other social relations – professional, corporate, family. Government policy is dominated by the private interests of those who are at the top of the power structure or near the power. Bribes, are regarded as additional revenue for the public employees for performing their functions and make up the main part of their income. Corrupt behavior is considered acceptable by the society and is not strongly opposed (Jandosova et al., 2002).

However, in the Kazakhstani context by virtue of the character and scale, corruption is not simply a separate phenomenon, it is a part of the everyday lives of Kazakhstanians. Corruption has flourished in the single-window centres, which are

located at the heart of the distribution of highly demanded services: legal, land and military registration. Two cases described below illustrate corruption at high-level involving the large-scale appropriation of the state resources by the political management of the coordinating body and OSS managers.

“Palms for Mrs. Minister”

The first example illustrates a corrupt case known among the public as *“Palms for Mrs. Minister”*, which was related to the misuse of power by the former Minister of Justice, Mrs. Zagipa Balieyva (Benditskyi, 2008b). The MJ planned for the allocation of large investments to establish single-window centres in terms of offices, technologies, furniture, and palm trees, which the Minister wished to use to decorate the OSS and make them look more user-friendly. The Financial Police discovered the disappearance of these palms from the OSS offices in Astana and found out that they were transported to the private apartment of the Minister. There were contradictory versions presented in explanation of this situation. On the one hand, the government officials acknowledged that the front-line staff did not take care of the palms, and the Minister agreed to keep them at home on a temporary basis. On the other hand, the officials stated that they took the palms to the Minister’s house without asking her permission as a present to the newly appointed political leader. According to the third version announced by the Minister, she purchased the same type of palms for herself, and there might have been some confusion with their transportation. Later the Financial Police cancelled the examination of this case without providing any public statements. Another case involving the Minister was in the misuse of state resources related to accusations of selling two corporate cars, one a “Toyota Land Cruiser” to her own husband (Benditskyi, 2006a). Despite public resonance in mass media and online many cases were not raised for investigation by the responsible authorities. Both examples provide just a snapshot of the large-scale corruption flourishing within the single-window policy framework. The participants mentioned stories of the single-window centres, which were built according to the reports, but never existed in reality due to the misuse of allocated state funds by the management of the MJ and OSS. While these examples illustrated unethical behaviour of the

political management, the following cases examine illegal practices among the OSS managers who followed their leaders in exercising corruption.

OSS as a “Family Business”

The OSS of Karasay Rayon in Almaty region was at the centre of public scandal due to the behaviour of its manager, Mr. Nurushev. As journalists discovered, the building of the OSS was used as collateral on a loan from a commercial bank for half a million US dollars over a 20 year period. The OSS building was not owned by the coordinating body as it should be, but by the family of the OSS manager. During the massive campaign to establish single-window centres in 2005-2006, Mr. Nurushev worked as a senior manager at the local department of justice and later was appointed to the position of the OSS manager in Karasay rayon. His wife, Mrs. Nurusheva, rented the building and land for the OSS. At that time property construction and prices for land reached a peak, and high number of clients visited the OSS to register their documents. The clients brought significant profits for the Nurushev family both through paying illegal payments to accelerate the speed of public services as well as using the services of their businesses, which were located around the single-window centre such as a cafe, car washing and a hotel.

The service users published a price list for illegal services at the OSS in Karasay rayon online, for example, “to come to the operator without queuing” cost 10.000 tenge (or 50 GBP); “to get a confirmation on absence of property” – 100 GBP; “to start-up a business company” – 200 GBP. One businessman left a comment that he paid 3.500 GBP to the “mediators” who helped him to re-register land in Karasay rayon within one day, and he was satisfied with fast service. According to the official statistics published by the local department of justice, over 75.000 cases of property registration were registered in Karasay rayon in 2007. Knowing the amount of the illegal fees and the number of services delivered through the OSS, one can easily imagine the scope and extent of corruption within this particular single-window centre. Importantly, the coordinating body did not make any attempts to investigate this case. It may be inferred that this lack of reaction means that the political elite are

well aware of such situations in the regions. Besides, one official from the MJ mentioned that the staff at the Ministry were not allowed to read the newspaper “Vremya”, which was actively investigating corrupt cases in the single-window centres.

As the above cases illustrated, the single-window centres as new public service organisations were not immune to the corrupt culture of the traditional bureaucracy and adopted corruption in daily operations. The patronage, relations-based system played an important role in the distribution of powers and resources, and protecting network members. The following section explores the customers’ perceptions of the single-window centres and quality of public services delivered through OSS.

9.2 ONE STOP SHOPS: CUSTOMER VIEWS

The culture of the single-window centres needs to be considered within the overall public sector environment, which had significant impact on the customer-oriented bureaucracy. The rating of 34 public service providers in terms of administrative barriers was published by the Sange Research Centre in 2007 on the basis of a survey poll of 5,760 respondents across 14 regions and had wide resonance in mass media and government (Jandosova, et al., 2007). Table 11 presents the ratings of public service providers in terms of administrative barriers with position 1 as having the most barriers.

Table 11: Rating of Public Service Providers in terms of Administrative Barriers

Rating	Service providers	Rating	Service providers
1	Land registration	11	Departments of justice State hospitals
2	Architecture	12	Customs authorities State medical centres State Registration authorities Healthcare Education Military registration bodies
3	Passport desks	13	Criminal justice bodies
4	Employment and social protection bodies	14	Railway service bodies
5	Property Centres	15	State universities Procuracy Fire service
6	Courts	16	Energy service
7	Tax Inspection Traffic Administrative Police Migration Police	17	Environmental protection Financial Police <u>One Stop Shop</u> Water supply bodies
8	Sanitary-epidemic bodies Local municipalities	18	Secondary schools
9	Telecommunications	19	Border security bodies
10	Nurseries Police		

Adopted from: Jandosova et al. (2007) *Administrative Barriers as a Source for Corrupt Practice in Civil Service*

Table 11 shows that the single-window centres were positioned in 17th place along with environmental protection, financial police and water supply bodies. Only secondary schools and border security bodies were perceived as less bureaucratic than the single-window centres in terms of administrative barriers. The OSS stakeholders, such as land registration, passport desks, property centres are among the top five of the most bureaucratic public organisations. Departments of justice

(11th position), state registration and military registration authorities (12th position) are also lagging behind the OSS. In terms of corruption the single-window centres were perceived as the least corrupt service provider compared to the other 34 public service providers (Jandosova et al., 2007: 41-42). 11 percent of respondents stated that services in the OSS were delivered on the basis of relationships, and 17 percent of respondents complained about impolite customer service (Jandosova et al., 2007). Overall, the OSS were considered by the customers as the least bureaucratic and corrupt service provider.

The MJ managed to use this report as a proof of the successful progress of the service integration policy. In response to the journalistic question, what measures were taken by the MJ to reduce corruption in the OSS, the Minister of Justice, Mrs. Zagipa Baliyeva, responded that the citizens assessed the work of the OSS positively compared to many other government organisations (Benditskyi, 2008b). The Minister explained that problems with long queues and delays with documents at the initial stage of implementation were caused by the shortage of offices. With the expansion of single-window centres across the country, the number of delays in service provision sharply decreased. As Mrs. Baliyeva explained:

For example, in 2007 0.4 % of documents were delayed in delivering 2 million services whereas in 2008 OSS delayed only 0.18 % of documents in the provision of 3 million services. It was planned to open 182 OSS in 2007, but we opened 214 OSS. Currently 260 OSS work in all regions and towns [...] Last year the OSS at the rayon level delivered 4.510.749 public services. And we are going to increase the number of OSS offices up to 500 covering 100 priority public services. (2008)

As highlighted in Chapter 6, the political management put emphasis on quantitative characteristics (such as number of services, number of clients), which were tangible and much easier to apply in performance evaluation compared to qualitative characteristics (such as nature of services, extent of customer satisfaction). The overall conclusion of the Minister's speech is that progress of the service integration policy was successful and followed the best international practice in Europe. Over time the customers have become used to the single-window centres and evaluated their performance in a much more positive way compared to the traditional

government bodies. This fact was not left ignored by the political managers, some of whom, for example, the Minister of Education and Science made official announcements that they disagreed with the survey results published by the Sange Research Centre providing statistical data on the performance of their organisations. However, none of them was able to provide the results of other customer satisfaction surveys.

The following discussion explores the reasons for specific public service, such as property registration delivered through single-window arrangements being corrupt (Jandosova et al., 2007: 41-42). As mentioned in Chapter 5, the political party “Nur-Otan” made public accusations against the MJ due to the poor performance and unethical behaviour of the single-window centres. “Nur-Otan” initiated an investigation of the service delivery process in the OSS in response to the customers’ complaints. According to the Law “On Property Registration” enacted in August 2007, the waiting time for property registration has increased from 5 working days to 15 working days. The members of the “Nur-Otan” party monitored the length of time required for property registration, which in fact took maximum two days including time for postal transportation between stakeholders and short breaks for the personnel, whereas the service itself took 75 minutes. They also reported that the mediators advertised in the local newspapers and this helped to accelerate the speed of services. It is worth highlighting that the political party decided to select the single-window centres, which were rated as the least corrupt by the customers as a case for public investigation rather than any other public service provider. As illustrated in Chapter 5 and in Chapter 6, many political managers disliked the enthusiasm of the Minister of Justice in promoting service integration, which put at risk their power authorities over financial and human resources, especially if more services were to be delegated to the OSS. The ministers and management of the political party were part of the political network, and the actions of “Nur-Otan” towards the single-window centres suggested that some of them were concerned about the increasing power and popularity of the OSS among the public.

The significance of the property registration service for Kazakhstani citizens needs to be considered in the socio-economic context of the country. As described in Chapter 4, property during 2003 - 2006 was the most profitable investment both for citizens and businessmen. Interest rates of deposits in the commercial banks varied from around 10 percent with an annual inflation rate of 18-20 percent, while the property prices increased twice or even three times every year. Most clients did not have the full amount to purchase property, so they took mortgage credits to buy property with the aim of re-selling it for a higher price. These clients found themselves trapped within short deadlines set up by the banks to submit documents from the single-window centres. The MJ increased the length of procedures for property registration from 5 to 15 working days, which immediately resulted in high demand of clients to accelerate the speed of service for “extra” payment. The shadow operations around property registration reached a peak. If the legal fee for property registration cost 50 GBP within 15 working days, the “extra” fee for accelerating speed of service within 5 days cost around 900 GBP.

The Financial Police initiated checks of mass media advertisements which suggested illegal services. There was wide publicity of the results of investigation by the responsible authorities and several OSS managers were dismissed. In response to the government and public critique, which put at risk the implementation of the service integration policy and reputation of the Minister of Justice, legislation was amended in October 2008 which enabled clients to register property within the standard period of time (15 days) or, for additional legal fee, within shorter period of time (2 days). The key point of the policy was that the clients could pay legally to accelerate the speed of service compared to the earlier practice of illegal fees. The interesting observation is that the MJ made these amendments only after the end of the boom of the property market when demand for this type of service sharply declined as the global crisis hit Kazakhstan. In Astana the number of services for property registration in 2008 reduced 10 times compared to the same period in 2007. Another observation is that the amount of the legal fee to speed-up the process of registration, which is 500 GBP, turned out to be twice as much as the illegal fee, thus, making corrupt payment more beneficial for the clients compared to the official payment.

The clients' comments expressed online about the amendments to the legislation regarding the new legal fees to accelerate the service are quite sceptical in this regard:

100.000 tenge is too expensive when you can do it for 30.000 tenge. Then, who is going to pay legally? The Ministry will have even more people willing to pay.

As always with our government: the right hand doesn't know what the left hand does. This won't change anything: those who takes bribes, will continue to do it, that's all!

Both quotes illustrate the clients' mistrust of the government and scepticism about the capacity to implement the original intentions of the policy. The first customer makes a proposition that the state body has secured a source of illegal payments by making the legal fee three times more expensive than the amount of the bribe. Thus, although the new legislation and official declarations of the political managers might create an illusion of fighting corruption and reducing bureaucracy, in practice policy implementation often fails due to the culture of the traditional bureaucracy, which the new public service organisations seem not to be able to overcome.

Another example to illustrate the impact of the traditional bureaucracy on the customer-oriented bureaucracy is a new service of "application for state nursery care" launched in January 2009. As Table 11 illustrates, nurseries were positioned in 10th place in the rating of public service providers in terms of administrative barriers. It is useful to give brief background information on public nursery care during Soviet Union and post-Soviet period to understand the reasons for the corrupt nature of this service. During Soviet times child care and pre-school education was given special attention by the central government. Mothers could send their children from 6 months old to 6 years to the public nurseries and pre-school child care, and work on a full-time basis. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the government of Kazakhstan could not afford the funding of public child care institutions and many of them were abolished. During the privatization campaign in the 1990s many nursery buildings were privatized by entrepreneurs, who launched their businesses: restaurants, casinos, offices etc. Due to the shortage of places available in the public nurseries and the development of the market economy, high demand for child care led to the

opening of private nurseries, whose services could only be afforded by a limited group of clients. For example, in Astana the monthly payment in the public nursery costs 10.000 tenge (or 50 GBP), the same service in the private sector varies from 50.000 to 100.000 tenge (250-500 GBP), with the average monthly salary of a public sector employee of 200-250 GBP. Normally, parents registered their children for public nursery care at the pre-school education department within the local municipality. High demand for the service led to long queues and bribe-seeking behaviour by the government officials and managers of nurseries. Since January 2009 the service of registration for public child care has been delegated from local municipalities to the single-window centres on a pilot basis.

According to the new service arrangements clients write an application and choose a nursery from a list by area of residence. The application is processed within one day, and clients get a confirmation number of the child's place on a waiting list. This service is provided free of charge. Overall, the process of application for public child care at the OSS followed the same administrative procedures as it was delivered at the local municipalities. Although the service was now provided in a more convenient physical environment, the service quality however, – application for public child care and getting a place in the public nursery – has remained the same. The clients have low expectations regarding service improvement as a result of the delegation of responsibilities from local municipalities to the single-window centres. Comments from the parents expressed online show their disappointment, mistrust and emotional stress caused by the poor quality of service and concerns for their children:

This will be a chaos! I have been registering my flat for 6 months until I reached the manager of OSS and made a scandal! And now our children will not be able to go to the kindergarten, only through personal relations.

I have two children and we are 1.400 in the queue for child care. How many state-funded nurseries are there in the South-Eastern district? Two! With 3 groups! The question is whether my children will go to the nursery before the school. The response is: NO!!!! It is just mathematics!

Many parents have been in the queue for child care for several years and are concerned that they might lose their position in the queue and have to start again. The clients believe that they would have to pay illegal fees in order to guarantee a place for their child in a public nursery.

How will parents monitor the progress of queuing? Or will we continue to run for years and years with this piece of paper and search where to give a bribe?

Nothing will change, but there will be even more headaches. As we gave payments, so we will continue and everyone accepts them, and everyone is happy, they even tell you “thank you”.

Previous customers’ experience at the public service organisations associated with ineffectiveness and lack of professionalism has had a negative impact on the image of the single-window centres. The clients believe that the real solution is to build more public nurseries. The negative attitude of citizens toward the government is well summarised in the following comment:

This will not change anything. We have been staying for 2.5 years in the queue, in 42nd position, and we are still there. Local akimats will still keep control in their hands. The irresponsibility of the government in decision-making and lack of thinking on policy actions leads to mistrust, and I have not trusted it for a long time.

Thus, the overall message from the service users is mistrust of the government to be able to improve the quality of service as a result of the re-distribution of functions between public service providers.

This chapter explored the impact of the traditional bureaucracy on the culture of the customer-oriented bureaucracy by examining the illegal practices adopted within single-window centres and customer views on the quality of public services delivered through the OSS. The final section summarises the findings of this chapter in the discussion below.

9.3 SUMMARY

Within a short period of time the single-window centres received positive evaluations by the customers and were perceived as the least bureaucratic and corrupt public service provider. This fact was not positively accepted by the stakeholders who were concerned about their positions, power and access to resources. One of the research findings was that the implementation of service integration policy has led to unintended outcomes. The key aim of the policy was to reduce corruption by eliminating direct contact between service providers and customers. In practice, however, the corrupt circle has included a new player – a representative of the OSS – in the role of a mediator between government bodies and users. Frequent cases of corrupt offences by the political management of the MJ, managers of the OSS and front-line staff across regions, illustrated in this chapter, have strengthened the negative image of the government. The scale of corruption at the OSS undermines positive improvements achieved by the policy implementation. As a participant from the MJ commented in this regard:

Every service has its own price. The most popular services are registration of property, land, business. Besides, the OSS managers have to pay regularly for their position as managers. The amount of illegal profit that flows from clients through the OSS to the Ministry is incredible!

The above quote illustrates that the OSS managers were participants of the social corrupt network: they have to follow traditional practices otherwise they would have to leave the jobs despite their professional achievements and apply to other public organisations. The new public organisations adopted the culture of the traditional bureaucracy and were not able to overcome the corrupt nature of public service delivery. The social network within the administrative system has put significant pressure on the OSS to follow the traditional patterns of work practices. The following final chapter presents the discussion of research questions and answers, and gives the conclusion of the thesis.

10. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS. CONCLUSION.

This chapter presents a discussion of the answers to the research questions outlined in Chapters 1 and 4. The service integration policy was an attempt of the Kazakhstani government to reduce red tape in the civil service and improve the quality of public services. An important point of departure for understanding the complexity of the implementation of the NPM reform in the Kazakhstani context is that it is rather complex in itself. NPM is a mixed bag of management and organisational theories that are to some extent inconsistent with one another and do not always give much indication of how to actually organise public administration (Boston et al. 1996). In addition, the actual implementation of NPM varies considerably from one country to another (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). This variety and complexity are due partly to different national contexts, but also to cognitive problems among the executives in relating to the reform wave. This research, by focusing on the implementation of the managerial reform, such as integrated service delivery in the transitional context of Kazakhstan has added even more complexity to the academic debate.

The aim of this thesis was to examine the service integration process in Kazakhstan, using the experiences of those involved in the policy implementation: the managers and front-line employees of the single-window centres. A further aim was to consider the utility of concepts such as organisational learning and “communities of practice” in analysing service integration policy. The final aim was to analyse the conceptual and practical difficulties associated with the transfer of NPM ideas on customer orientation to a transitional context such as Kazakhstan. This concluding chapter summarises the key findings from the research, discusses the extent to which the data collected answers the original research questions, considers the research as a learning process (from methodological as well as theoretical and empirical perspectives), and sets out some issues for further research.

10.1 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

As indicated in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 4, the research was based on three research questions related to the experiences of those involved in the implementation of the single-window policy, the problems of service integration in a transitional context, and the usefulness of “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” concepts in analysing public service integration.

- 1. What are the experiences of those involved in the implementation of public service integration through single-window arrangements in Kazakhstan?*
- 2. In what ways is service integration a problematic concept in a transitional context such as Kazakhstan?*
- 3. Are concepts such as “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” useful tools in analysing public service integration?*

This section discusses each question in turn, considering the material gathered in relation to each question, and then summarises, with an overall indication of how far the research answered the original research questions.

Research question 1

What are the experiences of those involved in the implementation of public service integration through single-window arrangements in Kazakhstan?

This question was intended to bring an understanding of how public service integration was implemented and experienced at the local level. The single-window policy deals with multiple service providers and faces fundamental challenges in relation to a cultural shift from the traditional bureaucracy to the customer-orientated bureaucracy, the context of which is crucial in shaping the impact of the service integration experience. The single-window policy also affects those using public services through single-window arrangements. In response to this question there are a number of aspects of this analysis that it is important to restate here.

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the research points to strong centralised control over the single-window centres. Although the single-window centres have their own budgets, and staff and authorities to manage these resources, they still rely on managerial directives from the central level. The overall approach in managing the OSS in Kazakhstan has followed the traditional pattern of managing the regional branches of the central government body by imposing total technological control over the performance of the OSS managers and front-line staff. The theme of strong centralised control emerges throughout the thesis. The control model of the single-window centres is rooted in standard quantitative measurement, monitoring and short-term targeting. As described in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, the routines of public service delivery are specific and detailed, and the roles of the managers and front-line staff are restricted. The research found that, although some participants (the managers of the OSS and MJ) felt that good progress has been made in improving service delivery since the single-window policy was launched, contradictions in policy implementation create frustration and resistance among the front-line personnel who deliver customer service, as they often have to deal with intensive emotional labour and a contradictory dilemma between quantitative and qualitative aspects of the public services. There are also difficulties for different aspects of communication between the front-office and back-office, which have a negative impact on the public service delivery and overall performance of the single-window centres.

Service integration policy in the Kazakhstani context is dynamic; there have been several changes in policy and procedures, such as delegation of service provision from the government departments to the single-window centres, the adoption of the single-access model of service delivery at the pilot stage, and its replacement with the alternative-access model and the return of the functions to the service providers. These changes present significant challenges for the public service providers. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, legislative changes in the procedures of public service provision, and the resistance of the political and administrative civil servants to the new policy, have led to shift away from the original single-access model of service delivery, which was successfully piloted to the alternative-access model and which

does not threaten the positions of the stakeholders in terms of power, resources and access to the illegal practices unlike the original model. The OSS managers and front-line staff commented on a change of relationship with the stakeholders from initial resistance and confrontation towards mutual cooperation after the alternative-access model was adopted and functions on service provision were returned back to the government departments. The new policy has resulted in providing an alternative for the Kazakhstani customers to get access to the public services by visiting different government departments or applying for several services at one location, which have a more user-friendly and customer-oriented approach. The service integration policy has changed the stereotype of the government officials that customer service can only be delivered by the professionals who have special degree. The new policy has had significant impact across regions and the entire public sector by stimulating partnerships, working across professional and organisational boundaries, among service providers. New technologies, standards and procedures have introduced new ways of service delivery through single-window arrangements and new ways of interacting among service providers, and between service providers and customers.

This thesis argues that public service integration policy has not been implemented to the full extent in the Kazakhstani context. The culture of the traditional bureaucracy has prevented the adoption of democratic, rule-based policies and procedures, in favour of relations-based habits of thought and practice. As discussed in Chapter 9, these paternalistic, relations-based cultural values are deeply rooted in Kazakhstani society, and the values of citizen-centred service, trust, teamwork and public accountability collided with the values of the government-centred and centralised system. In the current system, government officials are not motivated to implement service integration successfully as it puts at risk their positions, access to the resources and illegal practices, and exposes their performance under public scrutiny.

These aspects highlight the complexities of service integration policy and the difficulties it creates for all those involved. A number of problems with the policy were noted, such as the lack of trust and effective communication between service

providers, the dominating quantitative nature of performance measurement, the enforced strong centralised control over single-window centres and weak personnel policies. Some of these concerns are being addressed through changes, such as the establishment of inter-governmental working groups and the provision of on-the-job training by the stakeholders. However, concerns still remain over the role of the single-window centres among public service providers and the role of the service integration policy in the administrative reform. All of these policy-related factors shape the context and possibilities for public service integration.

Research question 2

In what ways is service integration a problematic concept in a transitional context such as Kazakhstan?

Service integration is difficult to achieve in practical terms, and problematic to understand conceptually. This question was intended to address the ways in which it has been defined and conceptualised, and how the process has been facilitated in Kazakhstan.

As the literature review of the NPM theories in Chapter 2 suggests, it is important to understand the country context in which the managerial reforms are implemented. A strategic planning tool called SWOT-analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) was used to provide a framework for structuring my answer to research question 2 in the following discussion (see Table 12). SWOT-analysis groups key pieces of information into two main categories: 1) internal factors - strengths and weaknesses internal to the organisation (for example, personnel, finance, technologies); and 2) external factors - opportunities and threats presented by the external environment (macroeconomic matters, technological change, legislation, and socio-cultural changes).

Table 12: SWOT-Analysis of OSS Policy Implementation in Kazakhstan

STRENGTHS		WEAKNESSES
1.	Policy was initiated by the President	Lack of follow-up political support to drive the policy. Lack of clear and realistic vision of service integration reform.
2.	Public service standards were introduced.	Service standards were not able to make in-depth changes of existing working practices.
3.	Rapidly improving technological infrastructure and computer literacy of the population.	Increasing digital divide between urban and rural areas.
4.	Good human resource capital (adult literacy rate 98%)	Reducing level of human capital with a dehumanising routine environment. Lack of training, inadequate payment.
5.	Development of partnerships between different government bodies and professions.	Resistance of the political management to promote service integration.
6.	Time and cost savings for both service providers and users	Lack of customer views for evaluation
7.	Use of technologies to improve access to the public services and information.	Technologies are adopted as a means of extending centralised control.
OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS
1.	Political ambitions to engage in anti-corruption and service modernisation reform.	Corrupt use of allocated public funds for service integration. Domination of group and individual interests over public service tasks.
2.	Emergence of new customers' needs (e.g. rising unemployment, migration from rural regions to cities)	Policy implementation could be at risk of continuation in the case of political changes
3.	Involvement of new stakeholders among government bodies	Increasing social gap: emergence of marginal masses in large cities.

Table 12 illustrates that each of the factors has strengths and weaknesses, and the success or failure of the service integration initiative depends on the government's choice to overcome barriers and move away from a command-control system or follow traditional paternalistic and corrupt system. Service integration is conceptually difficult due to the lack of a clear and general definition. Nonetheless there are some commonalities in conceptualisations of service integration; particularly that service integration involves partnerships, shared strategies, teamwork, and negotiating new identities. It is challenging in a practical sense given the size and scope of the OSS policy. Unlike many service integration initiatives that were more narrowly focused (for example, e-tax services), the single-window policy was taking a broad "whole of government" and multi-channel approach that presented larger and more complex challenges. The constraints faced by those involved in public service integration can be divided into four types: political, operational, technological and cultural. Each of these constraints is summarised in turn in the discussion below.

Political barriers

Promoting public service integration within a hierarchical, centralised context such as Kazakhstan is both beneficial and extremely challenging. It is beneficial as it helps to begin the service integration process in order to reduce bureaucracy and deliver better quality public services. Furthermore, it contributes to developing trust and effective communication between service providers. However, not all service providers are willing to participate in and support service integration, as successful service integration would put their performance under public scrutiny. These difficulties were discussed in more depth in Chapters 5 and 6. The single-window policy encouraged government-wide service integration, while the political system in Kazakhstan emphasised hierarchy and strong centralisation. The Kazakhstani politicians were resistant to join inter-departmental, intergovernmental and inter-sectoral initiatives over which they had less control in regard to decision-making and allocation of resources. Lack of strong political support pulled back service integration, which resulted in the delivery of only 25 services (including 16 services of the coordinating authority) during four years of implementation. Like the

politicians, administrative government officials were also concerned about losing power, status and their source of illegal payments if service integration was successfully implemented. Political battles between the management of the MJ as the coordinator of the OSS policy and other service providers with respect to the transfer of functions, services and resources persisted along the entire process of policy implementation. Several steps were taken to improve government accountability and transparency: service standards were introduced in the OSS and made more easily accessible to the customers; electronic performance management systems enabled the monitoring of the statistical data of service provision; a new grievance system allowed customers to send their complaints to the OSS managers and get feedback. However, as highlighted in Table 12, recent political changes in the MJ put at risk further the OSS policy implementation by delegating the coordination functions to the local municipalities, which lack experience in building partnerships and delivering joined-up services, and the capacity to manage and promote the service integration process.

Operational barriers

There are challenges of how far and in what ways public service integration can be measured, as there is no compulsory obligation for the government departments to integrate services through single-window arrangements. While some service providers provide public services directly to the customers and through single-window centres on an alternative basis, the majority of government departments continue to enjoy their monopolisation of information and services.

The single-window policy adopted a new multi-channel approach for Kazakhstan. Integrated channel delivery in Kazakhstan involved bringing together face-to-face, telephone and postal channels (with e-government in a short-term vision) to provide citizens with good quality services through a combination of channels. Among the benefits of this approach were improved access to the services, particularly for clients from far remote regions, better management of the public service infrastructure on a government-wide basis rather than institutions-based. The

integrated channel management strategy of the single-window policy recognised that the drive for cost efficiency must be balanced against the need for fairness and equity in access to services. For this reason, involvement of the postal offices as customer contact points enabled better access to remote rural communities, which were previously under-served by the government. Given the poor technological infrastructure and low level of computer literacy in the country, it was important that the single-window centres provided a face-to-face channel for the service users who were unable or unwilling to use other channels. Designing of joined-up services was complicated by differences among the stakeholders in their policies, laws, experiences and methods of working. Fostering service integration required information sharing across professions and organisations, and building new capacities for front-line customer service, which was problematic in a culture of mistrust, lack of tradition to work in partnerships, and lack of customer-orientation.

Service integration is also problematic in the Kazakhstani context due to the lack of adequate training and professional development for the front-line personnel. The participants commented on the gaps in the knowledge and skills required for delivering the multiple services of different stakeholders at one location. A number of different practical approaches have taken place in the case study organisations in Astana as discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. These have included the development of on-the-job training and induction schemes, as well as coaching methods to facilitate knowledge exchange between the front-office and back-office staff, senior colleagues and new recruits, to develop a mix of skills required for customer service. The important role of the “communities of practice” in providing support to the staff members was discussed in Chapter 8. It was noted that this on-the-job training can often be multi-functional. For example, inductions not only improve the new recruits’ understanding about service delivery processes, but also have a social function to facilitate their introduction to the organisational culture, norms and values of the single-window centres, as well as to help them meet staff from the back-offices of the stakeholder departments. Yet each method of training also has limitations resulting from the pressures of delivering an increasing number of public services, the constraints of funding, the contradictions in legislation and the

difficulties of intensive customer service. It has been emphasised throughout that service integration is a multifaceted process with a number of levels including the macro level of policy and the micro level of personal experiences. While examples of both levels have been considered, it should also be noted that there are also a range of other integration strategies in addition to those which have been discussed in this thesis, for example, providing services through an e-government online portal, which is currently under construction.

Technological barriers

Technological factors closely relate to the operational factors adding complexity to the overall situation. A number of researchers highlight the full and perfect power of electronic monitoring, which makes any other form of control unnecessary (Ferne, 1998). This work illustrated the imperfections of technological devices by arguing that customer service relations cannot adopt this simplistic model of “total control” (Bain and Taylor, 2000). As discussed in Chapter 6 and in Chapter 8, control over staff performance was conducted through the use of technological devices, however, the use of technologies was limited when it came to capturing qualitative aspects of customer service. This thesis found that even low-skilled employees, such as the front-line staff at the single-window centres, were difficult to manage. Their control was a complex task, and the core of this complexity relied on the fact that the nature of their work involved intensive customer interaction, and the use of technologies in such cases could at best only be partial. The front-line personnel were challenged with two fundamentally contradictory logics: a need to be cost-efficient and a desire to be customer-orientated. The electronic monitoring system created a myth of “perfect information” and total control. However, the reality was far from accurate, reliable or complete. An important part was missing, such as the tacit skills and interpretative knowledge of the front-line staff, as well as service quality perceived by the customers. It was demonstrated in Chapter 6 that the new technologies seemed to be an excellent tool for exercising and extending centralisation over the OSS managers and front-line staff.

Service integration was implemented in Kazakhstan to a limited extent due to the prevailing culture of the traditional bureaucracy, which favours paternalistic, relations-based habits of thought and practice. The Kazakhstani culture rejected the minimalist conception of the state, its role as a service provider, and the individual's role within society. The Kazakhstani culture conceives government as constituting, in the first instance, personal obligation and duty, with relationships depending upon networks and mutual obligations. The emphasis on the vertical dimension of the government constrained the development of shared values, which are required for a blending of organisational cultures across departmental and jurisdictional boundaries. Not only did government officials tend to look vertically rather than horizontally, they were also inclined to support departmental, rather than inter-departmental and inter-governmental, initiatives. International practice suggests that creating a common organisational culture is a lengthy process requiring both the removal of structural and managerial barriers and the development of shared commitment to such overriding values as teamwork and citizen-centred service. These considerations partially applied to the single-window policy efforts to create a new organisational culture and develop a new profession of front-line employees, who came from different organisations and professions in order to provide a range of public services. The aim was to develop and embed a service excellence culture within the single-window centres. This was facilitated by, extensive on-the-job training, induction schemes, and negotiations with the stakeholders. However, the single-window centres were not able to resist a government-wide culture characterised by patronage and corrupt nature of service provision. As Chapter 9 discussed, this research found a strong link between the government-wide culture and the culture in the single-window centres, which adopted the traditional pattern. Hence, the culture of the traditional bureaucracy was a significant barrier to successful service integration as it prevented the cultivation of a shared commitment to the values of citizen-centred service, trust, teamwork and public accountability, all the elements of which collided with the relations-based values of the government-centred system.

The OSS policy did not challenge the prevailing traditional structure that exists in Kazakhstani administration, nor did it create a connecting network among the public service providers. The new organisations did not shift the locus of budgetary authority and managerial responsibility from the centre to a point close to the delivered service. The single-window centres remain hierarchically dependent on the MJ, and report directly to the authority to which they originally belonged. The relationships between the MJ and the OSS are formal, and many managers of the single-window centres have adopted hierarchical managerial styles towards their staff, who are severely constrained by constant supervision. This is far from the normal NPM trend, in which a key point about the autonomy granted, is that it seeks to decentralise budgets and to take authority away from the centre.

The accountability process follows the traditional pattern. Evaluation of the front-line staff's work is made through quantitative measures, whereas qualitative targets such as the level of citizens' satisfaction remains ignored. Enhancement of services follows the top-down traditional process where the central government determines what is needed for users. As the participants commented in their interviews, the services of the OSS were selected and decided centrally by the government without any consultation with customers. In NPM theory evaluation of customer satisfaction is one of the techniques to yield important data and improve quality. While the Kazakhstani government declares a customer-orientation principle as a slogan for public modernisation reform, the citizens remain outside of the policy-making process.

These research findings showed that public service integration in Kazakhstan was driven both by the global trends for managerial reforms and country-specific political, organisational, technological and cultural factors. This research found that the global drivers for integrated service provision in Kazakhstan were diverse. These included globalisation, pressure from the international community, public dissatisfaction with the government, and the opportunities offered by the technologies for shifts in service delivery. A combination of these factors influenced the government's intention to turn to the opportunities presented for joined-up

working. The Kazakhstani OSS inherited many elements of the traditional public service system, such as hierarchical and centralised control, a lack of customer-orientation and the corrupt nature of the public services. In many ways the single-window centres became victims of the political ambitions to solve public service failures and eliminate corruption. The pressure to match political promises trapped the single-window centres in a cycle of short-term results thinking. The concepts of clear targets, performance indicators and transparency collided with a culture that was strongly influenced by legal control, a patronage system, and bureaucratic administrative procedures. The new technologies did improve access to the public services and performance monitoring, however, they became an excellent tool for exercising and extending centralised control. The OSS did not reduce corruption, on the contrary, the policy implementation resulted in new forms of corrupt schemes involving the front-line employees as the “mediators” between the service providers and service users.

The difficulties of service integration have been a theme throughout this thesis, but the progress which has been made in Kazakhstan and Astana in particular, has also been noted. The difficulties arise from understanding what public service integration means, and how it can be put into practice. Practice-related issues related to service integration were discussed throughout Chapters 5 – 8 and a number of responses were found in Kazakhstan, but it remains a complex and debated topic.

Research question 3:

Are concepts such as “organisational learning” and “communities of practice” useful tools in analysing public service integration?

The prominence of organisational learning and “communities of practice” in the literature on service integration makes critical analysis important. In order to answer this question a critical review of the relevant areas of the organisational learning literature was carried out, which formed the basis for the analysis of the nature of organisational learning and “communities of practice” within the single-window

centres in Chapter 8. The perceptions of learning in the interviews with the participants related to their experiences in service integration were also analysed.

The prominence of organisational learning in the service integration literature is reflected in the processes of the design and delivery of joined-up multiple services described by the participants. The “communities of practice” developed among the front-line personnel are intended to facilitate learning and knowledge exchange by passing information and skills from senior colleagues to the new recruits. There was an emphasis in some interviews on the importance of the CoP to support the learning processes through participation in daily work practices and observation of customer service. For the front-line staff learning is constructed at the level of the routine; learning new standards, technologies, unlearning the old and becoming accomplished in meeting the changing numerical targets. The managers and staff of the OSS are operating at the level of single loop learning as identified by the lack of questioning, lack of challenge, the reluctance to take risks and strong managerial control, which prevents the development of learning levels and which reinforces the routinised steps. As organisational learning is used both directly and indirectly as a frame of reference, it is clearly relevant to service integration. This research focused on learning at different levels: individual, organisation and government. Even with the type of flexible approach that has been taken in this research project, however, there are some difficulties with the concept of organisational learning. The processes of learning are not always clear, and even where they can be distinguished, using one level of learning as a basis for another, for example, learning of the front-line staff as a foundation for organisational learning of the single-window centre, is not unproblematic. Chapter 8 also highlighted the fact that issues such as learning and negotiating new identities are not straightforward. Therefore, while organisational learning and “communities of practice” are useful concepts there is a risk that their usage may mask issues of the lack of critical reflection, although this is an area on which further research is needed.

The findings of this research are consistent with research findings on customer service organisations in the developed countries where front-line employees

performed high emotional labour, faced contradictions between quantitative and qualitative dimensions of public service delivery and were trapped within single-loop learning while being discouraged to challenge the existing practices. The experiences of different groups, OSS managers and front-line personnel, government officials in coordinating authorities, stakeholders, and customers, highlight the difficulties that are encountered with the public service integration process. The information on implementation of the single-window arrangements in practice and the tensions between the traditional bureaucracy and customer-orientated bureaucracy allowed a number of issues to be brought out in evaluating the policy. Constraints and problems relating to public service integration in the transitional context have been noted and a range of responses to these have been discussed, considering also how these have developed over time. Organisational learning and “communities of practice” were difficult to operationalise through the methods employed in this study, and the third question has perhaps the least detailed answer, but the advantages and disadvantages were considered and its usefulness as a discourse have been noted.

The literature on the applicability and appropriateness of managerial reforms in developing and transitional countries proved to be useful for analysis of public service integration in Kazakhstan. Pollitt and Bouckaert’s (2004) model of explanatory public management reform variables (interaction between: socioeconomic forces, political system, elite decision-making, and administrative system) could be particularly useful for analysis of managerial reforms in Kazakhstan as a transitional country. Policy transfer literature takes a focus on policy goals, structure and content; policy instruments or administrative techniques; institutions; ideology; ideas, attitudes and concepts; and negative lessons.

Institutionalist theory might be helpful to understand public management reform in transitional countries (Hinings and Greenwood, 1988; Ferlie et al., 1996). From an institutionalist perspective, if there is to be transition in organisations then three elements such as the formal structure, systems of decision-making, and underlying interpretive schemas, which include core values, beliefs and ideology, must change simultaneously, but such archetypical transition is unusual. Another theory,

complexity theory (Haynes, 2003; Mitleton-Kelly, 2003), could offer useful account of the implementation of managerial reforms. Teisman and van Buuren (2007) argue that the shape of managerial reforms is not only context specific but also process specific, reflecting the dynamics of the implementation process. They claim that the implementation of public management reforms is a co-evolutionary rather than a linear process and “out of this co-evolutionary process, trajectory between different parts of the system (organisation, process, chain) and its environment, the concrete shape of the new public management reform emerges” (Teisman and van Buuren, 2007: 183). This theoretical interpretation is offered in the context of managerial reforms in Western Europe and remains unexplored in developing and transitional countries.

Overall, the research has provided breadth and depth in relation to these questions, but the answers raise new questions, which are discussed further below after a brief consideration of the research as a learning process.

10.2 RESEARCH AS A LEARNING PROCESS

The findings of the research in relation to the three research questions were summarised above, yet the research can be considered as a learning process not only in relation to answering research questions, but also learning about the process of research and the choices made. This section looks again at what was learnt from the research, this time in terms of what has been learnt empirically, theoretically, in relation to service integration policy and practice, and in terms of research design and methods. On this basis the significance and limitations of the research are then commented upon.

The theoretical and empirical findings have already been summarised, and are therefore noted here briefly. The empirical findings consist of a range of experiences of the service integration process, and the impacts of policy, understandings of what service integration is and how it can be facilitated and constrained, changes that have occurred since the policy was launched, and challenges which remain or which have

arisen. The single-window policy has contributed to a shift away from a specific focus on service improvement, to the broader issues of applicability of managerial ideas in a transitional context. This brings challenges not only in terms of resources and technologies, but, more importantly, in facilitating cultural change of the government apparatus from traditional bureaucracy to customer-orientated bureaucracy. In theoretical terms the research looked at existing concepts for service integration and how these might apply in a context of transitional country. The relevance of organisational learning and “communities of practice” within service integration context were also noted, again taking account of the issues of the current situation and a number of advantages and disadvantages were discussed. The difficulties in promoting double loop learning and critical reflection on the existing practices were discussed.

Research as a learning process can also be considered from the perspective of what others can learn from the research. A number of implications have been noted in terms of policy and practice, as discussed in Section 10.1. These issues relate to the understanding of the service integration processes and changes in policy. The distinction between service integration as a process and an outcome also has implications, as there are challenges in promoting and facilitating the service integration, and after designing joined-up services new issues have to be dealt with. Changes in policy such as the introduction of single-window arrangements have changed the context for public service delivery. These changes may lead to a need for a refocusing of resources and technologies, ongoing work on continuing adjustment of services. The main findings are restated again in the final summary.

It is also important to reflect on what has been learnt about research design and practice from the process of carrying out the research, as discussed in more depth in Chapter 4. Doing pilot study was found extremely helpful in terms of getting access to the participants, testing research methods and choosing qualitative methods, in future I would include pilot study as a necessary component of the research. For future research I would begin access efforts earlier in the research process, I would also try to be wary of assumptions about the ways in which the different stages of the

research might facilitate each other, as changing roles from participant observer to interviewer within case study organisations proved difficult. That is not to say that different aspects of the research were not mutually beneficial as regards access, but not always as anticipated.

On the basis of the findings outlined above and in relation to the research questions, and comments above, and having acknowledged limitations, what can be said about the significance of this research? It looks at public service integration within a Kazakhstani context, and takes into account of views and experiences from new and traditional service providers, policy coordinators and service users. The single-window policy usefully illustrates intergovernmental tensions that can arise when policies promoting public accountability, transparency and partnership working within transitional context. There is analysis of the complex nature of service integration, the ways in which it can be defined and promoted, and the difficulties related to implementing managerial ideas of decentralising management and customer-orientation. The contradictory dilemma between the quantitative and qualitative aspects of public services is used to identify and address some of the paradoxes of service integration in the Kazakhstani context. The usefulness of the organisational learning and “communities of practice” is also analysed. In such a fast-moving policy environment, such research can only offer a snapshot of a particular point in a process which may have since moved on. The limitations of a small-scale study must also be acknowledged, and the difficulties of accessing a hard-to-reach and diverse group of participants limit the possibilities of generalisation. Nonetheless, the research makes both an empirical and theoretical contribution. Empirically, it builds on the knowledge and experiences of those involved in service integration, considering how its effects are shaped by implementation within a transitional context. In theoretical terms, it adds to the conceptual debates on applicability of NPM ideas in transitional countries by examining extent of implementation of decentralising management and customer-orientation in the Kazakhstani context, and the implications of service integration as a process and an outcome.

10.3 FINAL SUMMARY

Using participant observation of the daily work practices within the customer service environment, analysis of policy documents and observation notes, interviews with the managers of the OSS and the coordinating body, and virtual ethnography of the customers' views, this thesis has examined the impacts of the policy, the responses to the challenges of service integration and the uses of an organisational learning framework. In relation to these analytic themes, as outlined above, the main findings are: the tensions and the changing relationships between the traditional bureaucracy and customer-orientated bureaucracy; the complex nature of public service integration; the limited extent of organisational learning, and the challenges and constraints of service integration within a transitional context. While service integration creates particular difficulties, for example, related to connecting databases of different stakeholders, often the problems encountered in the design and delivery of joined-up services are existing issues of public service provision that are exacerbated within the context of the single-window policy. These issues relate to the lack of trust and effective communication between service providers, nepotism, and corruption flourishing in the public sector, centralised control discouraging critical reflection, and the separation by professional and organisational boundaries. Overall, the responses to the single-window policy in Kazakhstan have highlighted the importance of a multi-level, partnership-based, flexible approach as service integration presents challenges for individuals, service providers, service users, policy makers and the government apparatus as a whole. A significant amount of progress has been made since the single-window policy was launched, but policies, procedures and power dimensions continue to change, changing the context for service integration and bringing new challenges.

This research presents a snapshot not only of the OSS policy implementation but of the overall political and administrative situation in the country. This research revealed striking similarities in Kazakhstan with other transitional countries in terms of facing both institutional and socio-cultural constraints during implementation of managerial reforms as described in Chapter 2. While lacking knowledge and state

capacity, the Kazakhstani government anxiously embraced NPM principles as a panacea for public service failures, ineffectiveness and corruption. The literature outlined in Chapter 2 suggests that the applicability of NPM is dependent upon the nature of relations between the state and civil society. Public pressure and people's expectations of better service played a large role in the successful implementation of administrative reforms in developed countries (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). In liberal democracies citizens are increasingly expecting quality and value for money from their public services. In considering the application of the NPM model to the Kazakhstani context as a transitional country, several important points need to be highlighted. First, the extent to which the demands of the society have put pressure on the government and, second, how far the government institutions have given way to pressures for the implementation of managerial-type reforms. The Kazakhstani government has not faced the same sorts of pressures from civil society that are faced in advanced Western democracies. The nature of the relationship between the state and civil society within Kazakhstan suppresses demands upon government. The first element of the relationship is a weak civil society which has not organised as interest groups to influence government's decisions and actions. The second is a deep-seated respect and fear for authority and the state which results in a lack of demand for accountability. On the other hand, Walsh (1995: 71) argues, that the *"more unified and centralised the system of political control and power, the easier it is to introduce new approaches to the management of public services."* This research showed that Kazakhstan is a country where government bodies can be put under authoritarian pressure to implement managerial reforms. There is an autocratic imperative to improve quality of public services and reduce corruption with evidence of significant progress and failure in certain areas. Major administrative reforms have taken place to introduce customer-orientation service and decentralizing management, downsize the government apparatus, implement public service standards for all government bodies and technologies for improving access to the service users.

The lack of state capacity is considered to be a significant constraint to the implementation of managerial reforms, as highlighted in literature review in Chapter 2. Kazakhstan is a highly centralised state with a lot of power in the hands of the

central government. As a consequence, Kazakhstan should have the capacity to implement such reforms, if the government were to be committed to them. However, the Kazakhstani political system also contains other factors that operate against NPM reform. An important factor that severely limited the introduction of managerial reforms was clientism, nepotism and corruption which are fundamental characteristics of the local political system (Cummings, 2007; Perlman and Gleason, 2007; Schatz, 2005). Managerial reforms which promote public accountability, transparency in policy-making and social inclusion have posed a threat to the elite control over state resources. NPM incorporates the importation of private sector management systems and techniques into the public services. Flexibility, innovation, the right to manage and delegation are promoted as valued behaviours by NPM. Such principles require administrators to become managers. However, as this research shows, in Kazakhstan the main administrative values are authoritative interpersonal relations and avoidance of initiative and responsibility. The major influential factors for these values are socio-cultural. Submissive and paternalistic tendencies, the avoidance of initiation and innovation are inherited within patriarchal, authoritarian, and relations-based system. This clearly presents a fundamental cultural difference from the principles underlying NPM. The prevailing administrative practices and procedures clash with democratic principles. The centralised decision-making structure, political loyalty-based recruitment, promotion and reward, as well as law-oriented administration hamper the introduction of delegated authority, customer-oriented service and merit-based personnel practices promoted by the NPM ideology.

As public service integration is a topical political issue, there are a number of potential audiences for this research including service providers, policy makers and academic researchers. What can the research offer for these different audiences? For service providers the research provides an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the single-window policy, the challenges faced and the way these challenges have been addressed. For academics and policy makers the research makes a valuable contribution to the scholarship on the applicability and appropriateness of managerial reforms in transitional countries, and highlights issues of ongoing importance, such as limited extent of public service improvement in the

corrupt and relations-based system, need for cultural shift from the traditional bureaucracy to the customer-orientated bureaucracy, new challenges and problematic aspects arising from re-contextualization of Western managerial reforms in transitional countries. Also in academic terms the research adds to debates around service integration concept analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of using organisational learning framework.

The overall conclusion from this research is that managerial reforms are not universally applicable and might lead to unexpected outcomes in transitional countries. Though the Kazakhstani government attempted to introduce NPM principles through major legislative changes, this has not necessarily made it more customer-orientated, accountable to the public, transparent and less corrupt. Since the situation in the Kazakhstani political system is rather similar to the situation in other post-Soviet countries, except the Baltic states, the findings of this research might be of particular interest for academics and practitioners who are interested in NPM reforms and policy implementation issues in post-communist countries.

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APPENDICES

1. Letter of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan
2. Topic Guide for Interviews

APPENDIX 1. LETTER OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE OF RK

ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫ
ӘДІЛЕТ МИНИСТРЛІГІ



МИНИСТЕРСТВО ЮСТИЦИИ
РЕСПУБЛИКИ КАЗАХСТАН

010000, Астана қаласы, Желіс даңғылы, 45 үй
Тел.: (3172) 39-12-13, факс: 32-54-44

№ 12 2006 г. № 11-3-3/12397

010000, г. Астана, пр. Победы, 45
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Агентство Республики Казахстан
по делам государственной
службы

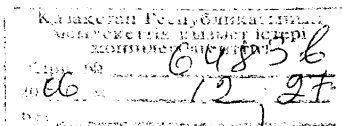
На письмо от 23 ноября 2006 года
№ 03-01-11/1148и

Министерство юстиции Республики Казахстан поддерживает Вашу инициативу по проведению совместного аналитического исследования по теме «одно окно» в Казахстане с участием ведущих зарубежных экспертов при содействии авторитетных международных организаций, а также выражает готовность к сотрудничеству в целях повышения качества оказания государственных услуг населению страны.

Вице-министр

Д. Куставлётон

Исп. Тлеубаев А.К.
Тел. 74-07-78



0013120

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN
45, Pobedy Street, Astana, 010000, tel. (3172) 39-12-13, fax (3172) 32-54-44

No. 11-3-3/12397 dated 26.12.2006

To: Civil Service Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan

In response to the letter dated
23.11.2006 # 03-01-11/1148u

The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan supports your initiative to conduct analytical research on the One Stop Shop in Kazakhstan with participation of foreign experts and expresses willingness for cooperation to improve quality of public services.

Vice-Minister

D.Kustavletov

APPENDIX 2. TOPIC GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS

Objectives

- To gather reflections of the OSS managers on the experience of service integration
- To determine benefits and barriers faced by the OSS managers
- To understand needs of the OSS to improve service integration

Introduction

- Introduce purpose of research; timing; consent

1. Present circumstances

- Age/gender
- Summary of current activity (work, education)
- Current residence

2. Concepts

What do they understand by “one stop shop” concept? What are its components?

3. What do they see as the drivers for service integration? (prompts: global, Kazakhstan: central and regional level)

a) Why services of registration were largely chosen? (prompts: what about social services)

4. What do they see as the benefits of service integration (both expected and emerging)? (prompts: for government, their organisation, stakeholders, public sector as a whole, customers, businesses)

5. What do they see as the barriers to service integration? (prompts: political, cultural, technological)

6. In looking particularly at the pilot projects of One Stop Shops:

a) what did they have in place at the beginning of the project?

b) what did they do? what happened (details of the process)? what support (infrastructure, consultation, training) were provided for their organisation?

c) were there any unintended outcomes?

d) if they had to do the pilot again, what would they change?

e) when regions are to undertake a similar projects, what would they need to have in place to have a successful outcome?

7. Has service integration met their expectations? (prompts: why, why not, what needs to be done) What has changed in terms of quality of service delivery, relations among managers, staff, stakeholders and customers?

Ending: give contact details